

# Resource Book

Conference on World Mission and Evangelism  
Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship  
8-13 March 2018, Arusha, Tanzania

Edited by Jooseop Keum



**World Council  
of Churches**  
Publications

*Resource Book*

*Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*

*Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship*

*8-13 March 2018, Arusha, Tanzania*

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# Introduction

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It is our joy and privilege to welcome you to the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania, 8-13 March 2018, on the theme “Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship”!

The proposal of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) to hold the 2018 conference was unanimously approved by the central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which met in June 2016 in Trondheim, Norway. The committee also accepted the main aim, theme and general outline of the conference programme. The CWME commission reflects on the four basic aspects of the 2018 Arusha conference—it is missional and ecumenical and has an African and youthful character.

In its deliberations, the commission strongly expressed the need for the conference to reflect missiologically—in an African and ecumenical context—on the signs of the times in our world today. This is a world in which God is active and present, bringing completion to God’s creation. It is a world in which the church is called to participate as the triune God’s partner in God’s creating and saving work.

“Moving in the Spirit” brings the notion of pilgrimage, of an ongoing journey of all believers led and guided by the Holy Spirit. This is a pilgrimage that is characterized by constant hope for a transformed world of justice and peace and a commitment to renewal in Christ. This theme offers a prophetic message amidst the complexities of today’s world.

The second part of the theme calls us to transforming discipleship. We are called to be disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, to whom we witness and whom we proclaim as we move in the Spirit. How we understand the phrase “transforming discipleship” carries three profoundly different and yet closely related meanings. We are called to live a life that transforms the very notion of discipleship as it is often understood. Such discipleship is one that is constantly transforming disciples as they open themselves up to Christ’s influence in their lives and to the formation that takes place in the Christian community. And such discipleship is one that is a commitment to transforming the world that is so full of injustice, pain and suffering.

This resource book carries the outcome of the coordinated studies and reflections on the theme of the Arusha conference. First of all, the new WCC mission statement approved by the WCC 10th assembly in Busan in 2013, “Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes”<sup>1</sup>, is a primary resource for our working together in Arusha.

CWME working groups and some regional ecumenical mission networks were engaged in a study process throughout 2017 on the following themes and produced study reports as conference resource materials:

- Working Group on Evangelism: “Being Disciples Means Sharing Good News”
- Working Group on Missional Formation: “Together on the Path: Called to Transforming Discipleship”
- Working Group on Mission from the Margins: “Moving in the Spirit—Called to Transforming Discipleship: Theological Reflections from the Margins”
- “Together for Life: The Mission in Latin America in the 21st Century”
- “The Pre-Africa Conference Report on World Mission and Evangelism, 11-15 September 2017, Nairobi, Kenya”
- “Called to Transforming Discipleship in North-Western Europe: Some Reflections on Witnessing in Secular Contexts”
- “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct”<sup>2</sup>

The Arusha conference is a space in which the participants will discuss the new mission direction of transforming discipleship<sup>3</sup> with pneumatological concepts of mission (mission infused with the Spirit). CWME would like to invite your contributions, suggestions and criticisms to the new WCC mission statement “Together towards Life”.

I hope these study reports will help your discernment and provide inspiration for mission thinking and actions. As director of the commission, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the CWME commissioners and the missiologists and practitioners who contributed to this study process.

Jooseop Keum  
Director, CWME

# Together towards Life

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## ***Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes***

### **Proposal for a new WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism**

*Submitted by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism*

*The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) has, since the WCC Porto Alegre Assembly in 2006, been working and contributing toward the construction of a new ecumenical mission affirmation. The new statement will be presented to the WCC 10th assembly at Busan, Korea, in 2013. Since the integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in New Delhi, 1961, there has been only one official WCC position statement on mission and evangelism, which was approved by the central committee in 1982, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation". It is the aim of this ecumenical discernment to seek vision, concepts and directions for a renewed understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in changing landscapes. It seeks a broad appeal, even wider than WCC member churches and affiliated mission bodies, so that we can commit ourselves together to fullness of life for all, led by the God of Life!*

### **Together towards Life: Introducing the Theme**

1. We believe in the Triune God who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all life. God created the whole *oikoumene* in God's image and constantly works in the world to affirm and safeguard life. We believe in Jesus Christ, the Life of the world, the incarnation of God's love for the world (John 3:16).<sup>1</sup> Affirming life in all its fullness is Jesus Christ's ultimate concern and mission (John 10:10). We believe in God, the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver, who sustains and empowers life and renews the whole creation (Gen. 2:7; John 3:8). A denial of life is a rejection of the God of life. God invites us into the life-giving mission of the Triune God and empowers us to bear witness to the vision of abundant life for all in the new heaven and earth. How and where do we discern God's life-giving work that enables us to participate in God's mission today?

2. Mission begins in the heart of the Triune God and the love which binds together the Holy Trinity overflows to all humanity and creation. The missionary God who sent the Son to the world calls all God's people (John 20:21), and empowers them to be a community of hope. The church is commissioned to celebrate life, and to resist and transform all life-destroying forces, in the power of the Holy Spirit. How important it is to "receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22) to become living witnesses to the coming reign of God! From a renewed appreciation of the mission of the Spirit, how do we re-envision God's mission in a changing and diverse world today?
3. Life in the Holy Spirit is the essence of mission, the core of why we do what we do, and how we live our lives. Spirituality gives deepest meaning to our lives and motivates our actions. It is a sacred gift from the Creator, the energy for affirming and caring for life. This mission spirituality has a dynamic of transformation which, through spiritual commitment of people, is capable of transforming the world in God's grace. How can we reclaim mission as transformative spirituality which is life-affirming?
4. God did not send the Son for the salvation of humanity alone or give us a partial salvation. Rather the gospel is the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and society. It is, therefore, vital to recognize God's mission in a cosmic sense, and to affirm all life, the whole *oikoumene*, as being interconnected in God's web of life. As threats to the future of our planet are evident, what are their implications for our participation in God's mission?
5. The history of Christian mission has been characterized by conceptions of geographical expansion from a Christian centre to the "un-reached territories", to the ends of the earth. But today we are facing a radically changing ecclesial landscape described as "world Christianity" where the majority of Christians are either living, or have their origins in the global South and East.<sup>2</sup> Migration has become a worldwide, multi-directional phenomenon which is re-shaping the Christian landscape. The emergence of strong Pentecostal and charismatic movements from different localities is one of the most noteworthy characteristics of world Christianity today. What are the insights for mission and evangelism—theologies, agendas and practices—of this "shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity"?
6. Mission has been understood as a movement taking place from the centre to the periphery, and from the privileged to the marginalized of society. Now people at the margins are claiming their key role as agents of mission and affirming mission as transformation. This reversal of roles in terms of envisioning mission has strong biblical foundations because God chose the poor,



the foolish and the powerless (1 Cor. 1:18-31) to further God's mission of justice and peace so that life may flourish. If there is a shift of the mission concept from "mission *to* the margins" to "mission *from* the margins", what then is the distinctive contribution of the people from the margins? And why are their experiences and visions crucial for re-imagining mission and evangelism today?

7. We are living in a world in which faith in mammon threatens the credibility of the gospel. Market ideology is spreading the propaganda that the global market will save the world through unlimited growth. This myth is a threat not only to economic life but also to the spiritual life of people, and not only to humanity but also to the whole creation. How can we proclaim the good news and values of God's kingdom in the global market, or win over the spirit of the market? What kind of missional action can the church take in the midst of economic and ecological injustice and crisis on a global scale?
8. All Christians, churches and congregations are called to be vibrant messengers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the good news of salvation. Evangelism is a confident but humble sharing of our faith and conviction with other people. Such sharing is a gift to others which announces the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ. It is the inevitable fruit of genuine faith. Therefore, in each generation, the church must renew its commitment to evangelism as an essential part of the way we convey God's love to the world. How can we proclaim God's love and justice to a generation living in an individualized, secularized and materialized world?
9. The church lives in multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts and new communication technology is also bringing the people of the world into a greater awareness of one another's identities and pursuits. Locally and globally Christians are engaged with people of other religions and cultures in building societies of love, peace and justice. Plurality is a challenge to the churches and serious commitment to inter-faith dialogue and cross-cultural communication is therefore indispensable. What are the ecumenical convictions regarding common witnessing and practising life-giving mission in a world of many religions and cultures?
10. The church is a gift of God to the world for its transformation toward the kingdom of God. Its mission is to bring new life and announce the loving presence of God in our world. We must participate in God's mission in unity, overcoming the divisions and tensions that exist among us, so that the world may believe and all may be one (John 17:21). The church, as the communion of Christ's disciples, must become an inclusive community and exists to bring healing and reconciliation to the world. How can the

church renew herself to be missional and move forward together towards life in its fullness?

11. This statement highlights some key developments in understanding the mission of the Holy Spirit within the mission of the Triune God (*missio Dei*) which have emerged through the work of CWME. It does so under four main headings:

- Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life
- Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins
- Spirit of Community: Church on the Move
- Spirit of Pentecost: Good News for All

Reflection on such perspectives enables us to embrace dynamism, justice, diversity and transformation as key concepts of mission in changing landscapes today. In response to the questions posed above, we conclude with ten affirmations for mission and evangelism today.

## **Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life**

### **The Mission of the Spirit**

12. God's Spirit—*ru'ach*—moved over the waters at the beginning (Gen. 1:2), being the source of life and the breath of humankind (Gen. 2:7). In the Hebrew Bible, the Spirit led the people of God—inspiring wisdom (Prov. 8), empowering prophecy (Is. 61:1), stirring life from dry bones (Ezek. 37), prompting dreams (Joel 2) and bringing renewal as the glory of the Lord in the temple (2 Chron. 7:1).

13. The same Spirit of God, which “swept over the face of the waters” in creation, descended on Mary (Luke 1:35) and brought forth Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:10) and commissioned him for his mission (Luke 4:14, 18). Jesus Christ, full of the Spirit of God, died on the cross. He gave up the spirit (John 19:30). In death, in the coldness of the tomb, by the power of the Holy Spirit he was raised to life, the firstborn from the dead (Rom. 8:11).

14. After his resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to his community and sent his disciples in mission: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21-22). By the gift of the Holy Spirit, “the power from on high”, they were formed into a new community of witness to the hope in Christ (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). In the Spirit of unity, the early church lived together and shared her goods among her members (Acts 2:44-45).

15. The universality of the Spirit's economy in creation and the particularity of the Spirit's work in redemption have to be understood together as the mission of the Spirit for the new heaven and earth, when God finally will be "all in all" (1 Cor.15:24-28). The Holy Spirit works in the world often in mysterious and unknown ways beyond our imagination (Luke 1:34-35; John 3:8; Acts 2:16-21).
16. Biblical witness attests to a variety of understandings of the role of the Holy Spirit in mission. One perspective of the role of the Holy Spirit in mission emphasizes the Holy Spirit as fully dependent on Christ, the Paraclete and the one who will come as Counsellor and Advocate only after Christ has gone to the Father. The Holy Spirit is seen as the continuing presence of Christ, his agent to fulfil the task of mission. This understanding leads to a missiology focusing on sending out and going forth.
17. Another perspective emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of Truth" that leads us to the "whole truth" (John 16:13) and blows wherever he/ she wills (John 3:8), thus embracing the whole of the cosmos, therefore proclaiming the Holy Spirit as the source of Christ, and the church as the eschatological coming together (*synaxis*) of the people of God in God's kingdom. The second perspective posits that the faithful go forth in peace (in mission) after they have experienced in their eucharistic gathering the eschatological kingdom of God as a glimpse and foretaste of it. Mission as going forth is thus the outcome, rather than the origin of the church, and is called "liturgy after the liturgy"<sup>3</sup>.
18. What is clear is that by the Spirit we participate in the mission of love that is at the heart of the life of the Trinity. This results in Christian witness which unceasingly proclaims the salvific power of God through Jesus Christ and constantly affirms God's dynamic involvement, through the Holy Spirit, in the whole created world. All who respond to the outpouring of the love of God are invited to join in with the Spirit in the mission of God.

## **Mission and the Flourishing of Creation**

19. Mission is the overflow of the infinite love of the Triune God. God's mission begins with the act of creation. Creation's life and God's life are entwined. The mission of God's Spirit encompasses us all in an ever-giving act of grace. We are therefore called to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all created life. We hear the cry of the earth as we listen to the cries of the poor and we know that from its beginning the earth has cried out to God over humanity's injustice (Gen. 4:10).

20. Mission with creation at its heart is already a positive movement in our churches through campaigns for eco-justice and more sustainable lifestyles and the development of spiritualities that are respectful of the earth. However, we have sometimes forgotten that the whole of creation is included in the reconciled unity toward which we are all called (2 Cor. 5:18-19). We do not believe that the earth is to be discarded and only souls saved; both the earth and our bodies have to be transformed through the Spirit's grace. As the vision of Isaiah and John's revelation testify, heaven and earth will be made new (Is. 11:1-9; 25:6-10; 66:22; Rev. 21:1-4).
21. Our participation in mission, our being in creation and our practice of the life of the Spirit need to be woven together for they are mutually transformative. We ought not to seek the one without the others. If we do, we will lapse into an individualistic spirituality that leads us to falsely believe we can belong to God without belonging to our neighbour and we will fall into a spirituality that simply makes us feel good while other parts of creation hurt and yearn.
22. We need a new conversion (*metanoia*) in our mission, which invites a new humility in regard to the mission of God's Spirit. We tend to understand and practise mission as something done by humanity *to* others. Instead, humans can participate in communion *with* all of creation in celebrating the work of the Creator. In many ways creation is in mission to humanity, for instance the natural world has a power that can heal the human heart and body. The wisdom literature affirms creation's praise of its Creator (Ps. 19:1-4; 66:1; 96:11-13; 98:4; 100:1; 150:6). The Creator's joy and wonder in creation is one of the sources of our spirituality (Job 38-39).
23. We want to affirm our spiritual connection with creation, yet the reality is the earth is being polluted and exploited. Consumerism triggers not limitless growth but rather endless exploitation of the earth's resources. Human greed is contributing to global warming and other forms of climate change. If this trend continues and earth is fatally damaged, what can we imagine salvation to be? Humanity cannot be saved alone while the rest of the created world perishes. Eco-justice cannot be separated from salvation, and salvation cannot come without a new humility that respects the needs of all life on earth.

## **Spiritual Gifts and Discernment**

24. The Holy Spirit gives gifts freely and impartially (1 Cor. 12:8-10; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11) which are to be shared for the building up of others (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26) and the reconciliation of the whole creation (Rom.

8:19-23). One of the gifts of the Spirit is discernment of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10). We discern the Spirit of God wherever life in its fullness is affirmed and in all its dimensions, including liberation of the oppressed, healing and reconciliation of broken communities and the restoration of the creation. We also discern evil spirits wherever forces of death and destruction of life prevail.

25. The early Christians, like many today, experienced a world of many spirits. The New Testament witnesses to diverse spirits, including evil spirits, “ministering spirits” (i.e., angels, Heb. 1:14), “principalities” and “powers” (Eph. 6:12), the beast (Rev. 13:1-7) and other powers—both good and evil. The apostle Paul also testifies to some spiritual struggle (Eph. 6:10-18; 2 Cor. 10:4-6) and the injunction to resist the devil (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8). The churches are called to discern the work of the life-giving Spirit sent into the world and to join with the Holy Spirit in bringing about God’s reign of justice (Acts 1:6-8). When we have discerned the Holy Spirit’s presence, we are called to respond, recognizing that God’s Spirit is often subversive, leading us beyond boundaries and surprising us.
26. Our encounter with the Triune God is inward, personal, and communal but also directs us outward in missionary endeavour. The traditional symbols and titles for the Spirit (such as fire, light, dew, fountain, anointing, healing, melting, warming, solace, comfort, strength, rest, washing, shining) show that the Spirit is familiar with our lives and connected with all the aspects of relationship, life and creation with which mission is concerned. We are led by the Spirit into various situations and moments, into meeting points with others, into spaces of encounter and into critical locations of human struggle.
27. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom (Is. 11:3; Eph. 1:17) and guides into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit inspires human cultures and creativity, so it is part of our mission to acknowledge, respect and cooperate with life-giving wisdoms in every culture and context. We regret that mission activity linked with colonization has often denigrated cultures and failed to recognize the wisdom of local people. Local wisdom and culture which is life-affirming is a gift from God’s Spirit. We lift up testimonies of peoples whose traditions have been scorned and mocked by theologians and scientists, yet their wisdom offers us the vital and sometimes new orientation that can connect us again with the life of the Spirit in creation, which helps us to consider the ways in which God is revealed in creation.

28. The claim that the Spirit is with us is not for us to make, but for others to recognize in the life that we lead. The apostle Paul expresses this by encouraging the church to bear the fruits of the Spirit which entail love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, self-control (Gal. 5:23). As we bear these fruits, we hope others will discern the love and power of the Spirit at work.

## **Transformative Spirituality**

29. Authentic Christian witness is not only in *what* we do in mission but *how* we live out our mission. The church in mission can only be sustained by spiritualities deeply rooted in the Trinity's communion of love. Spirituality gives our lives their deepest meaning. It stimulates, motivates and gives dynamism to life's journey. It is energy for life in its fullness and calls for a commitment to resist all forces, powers and systems which deny, destroy and reduce life.

30. Mission spirituality is always transformative. Mission spirituality resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics, and even our churches. "Our faithfulness to God and God's free gift of life compels us to confront idolatrous assumptions, unjust systems, politics of domination and exploitation in our current world economic order. Economics and economic justice are always matters of faith as they touch the very core of God's will for creation."<sup>4</sup> Mission spirituality motivates us to serve God's economy of life, not mammon, to share life at God's table rather than satisfy individual greed, to pursue change to a better world while challenging the self-interest of the powerful who desire to maintain the status quo.

31. Jesus has told us, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24, KJV). The policy of unlimited growth through the domination of the global free market is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and from nature. "It makes the false promise that it can save the world through creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance which amounts to idolatry."<sup>5</sup> This is a global system of mammon that protects the unlimited growth of wealth of only the rich and powerful through endless exploitation. This tower of greed is threatening the whole household of God. The reign of God is in direct opposition to the empire of mammon.

32. Transformation can be understood in the light of the Paschal mystery: "If we have died with Christ, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Tim. 2:11-12). In situations of oppression, discrimination and hurt, the cross of Christ is the power of God for salvation

(1 Cor. 1:18). Even in our time, some have paid with their lives for their Christian witness, reminding us all of the cost of discipleship. The Spirit gives Christians courage to live out their convictions, even in the face of persecution and martyrdom.

33. The cross calls for repentance in light of misuse of power and use of the wrong kind of power in mission and in the church. “Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures.”<sup>6</sup> The Spirit empowers the powerless and challenges the powerful to empty themselves of their privileges for the sake of the disempowered.
34. Experiencing life in the Spirit is to taste life in its fullness. We are called to witness to a movement toward life, celebrating all that the Spirit continues to call into being, walking in solidarity in order to cross the rivers of despair and anxiety (Ps. 23, Is. 43:1-5). Mission provokes in us a renewed awareness that the Holy Spirit meets us and challenges us at all levels of life, and brings newness and change to the places and times of our personal and collective journeys.
35. The Holy Spirit is present with us as companion, yet never domesticated or “tame”. Among the surprises of the Spirit are the ways in which God works from locations which appear to be on the margins and through people who appear to be excluded.

## **Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins**

36. God’s purpose for the world is not to create another world, but to re-create what God has already created in love and wisdom. Jesus began his ministry by claiming that to be filled by the Spirit is to liberate the oppressed, to open eyes that are blind, and to announce the coming of God’s reign (Luke 4:16-18). He went about fulfilling this mission by opting to be with the marginalized people of his time, not out of paternalistic charity but because their situations testified to the sinfulness of the world, and their yearnings for life pointed to God’s purposes.
37. Jesus Christ relates to and embraces those who are most marginalized in society, in order to confront and transform all that denies life. This includes cultures and systems which generate and sustain massive poverty, discrimination and dehumanization, and that exploit or destroy people and the earth. Mission from the margins calls for an understanding of the

complexities of power dynamics, global systems and structures, and local contextual realities. Christian mission has at times been understood and practised in ways which failed to recognize God's alignment with those consistently pushed to the margins. Therefore, mission from the margins invites the church to re-imagine mission as a vocation from God's Spirit who works for a world where the fullness of life is available for all.

### **Why Margins and Marginalization?**

38. Mission from the margins seeks to counteract injustices in life, church, and mission. It seeks to be an alternative missional movement against the perception that mission can only be done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, or by the privileged to the marginalized. Such approaches can contribute to oppression and marginalization. Mission from the margins recognizes that being in the centre means having access to systems that lead to one's rights, freedom and individuality being affirmed and respected; living in the margins means exclusion from justice and dignity. Living on the margins, however, can provide its own lessons. People on the margins have agency, and can often see what, from the centre, is out of view. People on the margins, living in vulnerable positions, often know what exclusionary forces are threatening their survival and can best discern the urgency of their struggles; people in positions of privilege have much to learn from the daily struggles of people living in marginal conditions.
39. Marginalized people have God-given gifts that are under-utilized because of disempowerment, and denial of access to opportunities and/or justice. Through struggles in and for life, marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.
40. Because the context of missional activity influences its scope and character, the social location of all engaged in mission work must be taken into account. Missiological reflections need to recognize the different value orientations that shape missional perspectives. The aim of mission is not simply to move people from the margins to centres of power but to confront those who remain the centre by keeping people on the margins. Instead, churches are called to *transform* power structures.
41. The dominant expressions of mission, in the past and today, have often been directed *at* people on the margins of societies. These have generally viewed those on the margins as recipients and not active agents of missionary activity. Mission expressed in this way has too often been complicit with oppressive and life-denying systems. It has generally aligned with the



privileges of the centre and largely failed to challenge economic, social, cultural and political systems which have marginalized some peoples. Mission from the centre is motivated by an attitude of paternalism and a superiority complex. Historically, this has equated Christianity with Western culture and resulted in adverse consequences, including the denial of the full personhood of the victims of such marginalization.

42. A major common concern of people from the margins is the failure of societies, cultures, civilizations, nations and even churches to honour the dignity and worth of *all* persons. Injustice is at the roots of the inequalities that give rise to marginalization and oppression. God's desire for justice is inextricably linked to God's nature and sovereignty: "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords. . . . who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who also loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing" (Deut. 10:17-18). All missional activity must, therefore, safeguard the sacred worth of every human being and of the earth (cf. Is. 58).

### **Mission as Struggle and Resistance**

43. The affirmation of God's mission (*missio Dei*) points to the belief in God as One who acts in history and in creation, in concrete realities of time and contexts, who seeks the fullness of life for the whole earth through justice, peace and reconciliation. Participation in God's ongoing work of liberation and reconciliation by the Holy Spirit, therefore, includes discerning and unmasking the demons that exploit and enslave. For example, this involves deconstructing patriarchal ideologies, upholding the right to self-determination for Indigenous peoples, and challenging the social embeddedness of racism and casteism.
44. The church's hope is rooted in the promised fulfilment of the reign of God. It entails the restoration of right relationships between God and humanity and all of creation. Even though this vision speaks to an eschatological reality, it deeply energizes and informs our current participation in God's salvific work in this penultimate period.
45. Participation in God's mission follows the way of Jesus, who came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45); who tears down the mighty and powerful and exalts the lowly (Luke 1:46-55); and whose love is characterized by mutuality, reciprocity and interdependence. It, therefore, requires a commitment to struggle and resist the powers that obstruct the fullness of life that God wills for all, and a willingness to work with all people involved in movements and initiatives committed to the causes of justice, dignity and life.

## Mission Seeking Justice and Inclusivity

46. The good news of God's reign is about the promise of the actualization of a just and inclusive world. Inclusivity fosters just relationships in the community of humanity and creation, with mutual acknowledgement of persons and creation, and mutual respect and sustenance of each one's sacred worth. It also facilitates each one's full participation in the life of the community. Baptism in Christ implies a lifelong commitment to give an account of this hope by overcoming the barriers in order to find a common identity under the sovereignty of God (Gal. 3:27-28). Therefore, discrimination on the basis of xenophobia, racism, classism, casteism, sexism, ableism, ageism or against people on any other grounds such as religion, sexual orientation, language, disability, incapacity, or having a medical condition such as being HIV-positive, is unacceptable in the sight of God.
47. Jesus promises that the last shall be first (Matt. 20:16). To the extent that the church practises radical hospitality to the estranged in society, it demonstrates commitment to embodying the values of the reign of God (Is. 58:6). To the extent that it denounces self-centredness as a way of life, it makes space for the reign of God to permeate human existence. To the extent that it renounces violence in its physical, psychological and spiritual manifestations both in personal interactions and in the economic, political, and social systems, it testifies to the reign of God at work in the world.
48. In reality, however, mission, money and political power are strategic partners. Although our theological and missiological talk says a lot about the mission of the church being in solidarity with the poor, sometimes in practice it is much more concerned with being in the centres of power, eating with the rich and lobbying for money to maintain ecclesial bureaucracy. This poses particular challenges to reflect on what is the good news for people who are privileged and powerful.
49. The church is called to make present God's holy and life-affirming plan for the world revealed in Jesus Christ. It means rejecting values and practices which lead to the destruction of community. Christians are called to acknowledge the sinful nature of all forms of discrimination and transform unjust structures. This call places certain expectations on the church. It must refuse to harbour oppressive forces within its ranks, acting instead as a counter-cultural community. The biblical mandate to the covenant community in both testaments is characterized by the dictum, "It shall not be so among you" (Matt. 20:26, KJV).

## Mission as Healing and Wholeness

50. Actions toward healing and wholeness of life of persons and communities are an important expression of mission. Healing was not only a central feature of Jesus' ministry but also a feature of his call to his followers to continue his work (Matt. 10:1). Healing is also one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9; Acts 3). The Spirit empowers the church for a life-nurturing mission, which includes prayer, pastoral care, and professional health care on the one hand, and prophetic denunciation of the root causes of suffering, transforming structures that dispense injustice and the pursuit of scientific research on the other.
51. Health is more than physical and/or mental well-being, and healing is not primarily medical. This understanding of health coheres with the biblical-theological tradition of the church, which sees a human being as a multidimensional unity, and the body, soul and mind as interrelated and interdependent. It thus affirms the social, political and ecological dimensions of personhood and wholeness. Health, in the sense of wholeness, is a condition related to God's promise for the end of time, as well as a real possibility in the present.<sup>7</sup> Wholeness is not a static balance of harmony but rather involves living-in-community with God, people and creation. Individualism and injustice are barriers to community building, and therefore to wholeness. Discrimination on grounds of medical conditions or disability—including HIV and AIDS—is contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ. When all the parts of our individual and corporate lives that have been left out are included, and wherever the neglected or marginalized are brought together in love, such that wholeness is experienced, we may discern signs of God's reign on earth.
52. Societies have tended to see disability or illness as a manifestation of sin or a medical problem to be solved. The medical model has emphasized the correction or cure of what is assumed to be the "deficiency" in the individual. Many who are marginalized, however, do not see themselves as "deficient" or "sick". The Bible recounts many instances where Jesus healed people with various infirmities but, equally importantly, he restored people to their rightful places within the fabric of the community. Healing is more about the restoration of wholeness than about correcting something perceived as defective. To become whole, the parts that have become estranged need to be reclaimed. The fixation on cure is thus a perspective that must be overcome in order to promote the biblical focus. Mission should foster the full participation of people with disabilities and illness in the life of the church and society.

53. Christian medical mission aims at achieving health for all, in the sense that all people around the globe will have access to quality health care. There are many ways in which churches can be, and are, involved in health and healing in a comprehensive sense. They create or support clinics and mission hospitals; they offer counselling services, care groups and health programmes; local churches can create groups to visit sick congregation members. Healing processes could include praying with and for the sick, confession and forgiveness, the laying-on of hands, anointing with oil, and the use of charismatic spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12). But it must also be noted that inappropriate forms of Christian worship, including triumphalistic healing services in which the healer is glorified at the expense of God, and where false expectations are raised, can deeply harm people. This is not to deny God's miraculous intervention of healing in some cases.
54. As a community of imperfect people, and as part of a creation groaning in pain and longing for its liberation, the Christian community can be a sign of hope, and an expression of the kingdom of God here on earth (Rom. 8:22-24). The Holy Spirit works for justice and healing in many ways and is pleased to indwell the particular community which is called to embody Christ's mission.

## **Spirit of Community: Church on the Move**

### **God's Mission and the Life of the Church**

55. The life of the church arises from the love of the Triune God. "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Mission is a response to God's urging love shown in creation and redemption. "God's love invites us" (*Caritas Christi urget nos*). This communion (*koinonia*) opens our hearts and lives to our brothers and sisters in the same movement of sharing God's love (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Living in that love of God, the church is called to become good news for all. The Triune God's overflowing sharing of love is the source of all mission and evangelism.
56. God's love, manifest in the Holy Spirit, is an inspirational gift to all humanity "in all times and places"<sup>8</sup> and for all cultures and situations. The powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, revealed in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, initiates us into the fullness of life that is God's gift to each one of us. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God indwells the church, revealing God's purposes for the world, and empowering and enabling its members to participate in the realization of those purposes.

57. The church in history has not always existed but, both theologically and empirically, came into being for the sake of mission. It is not possible to separate church and mission in terms of their origin or purpose. To fulfil God's missionary purpose is the church's aim. The relationship between church and mission is very intimate because the same Spirit of Christ who empowers the church in mission is also the life of the church. At the same time as he sent the church into the world, Jesus Christ breathed the Holy Spirit into the church (John 20:19-23). Therefore, the church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. If it does not engage in mission, it ceases to be church.
58. Starting with God's mission leads to an ecclesiological approach "from below". In this perspective it is not the church that has a mission but rather the mission that has a church. Mission is not a project of expanding churches but of the church embodying God's salvation in this world. Out of this follows a dynamic understanding of the apostolicity of the church: apostolicity is not only safeguarding the faith of the church through the ages but also participating in the apostolate. Thus the churches mainly and foremost need to be missionary churches.

### **God's Mission and the Church's Unity**

59. Living out our faith in community is an important way of participating in mission. Through baptism, we become sisters and brothers belonging together in Christ (Heb. 10:25). The church is called to be an inclusive community that welcomes all. Through word and deed and in its very being, the church foretastes and witnesses to the vision of the coming reign of God. The church is the *coming together* of the faithful and their *going forth* in peace.
60. Practically, as well as theologically, mission and unity belong together. In this regard, the integration in 1961 of IMC and WCC was a significant step. This historical experience encourages us to believe that mission and church can come together. This aim, however, is not yet fully accomplished. We have to continue this journey in our century with fresh attempts so that the church becomes truly missionary.
61. The churches realize today that in many respects they are still not adequate embodiments of God's mission. Sometimes, a sense of separation of mission and church still prevails. The lack of full and real unity in mission still harms the authenticity and credibility of the fulfilment of God's mission in this world. Our Lord prayed "that they may all be one . . . so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). Thus mission and unity are intertwined. Consequently there is the need to open up our reflections on church and

unity to an even wider understanding of unity: the unity of humanity and even the cosmic unity of the whole of God's creation.

62. The highly competitive environment of the free market economy has unfortunately influenced some churches and para-church movements to seek to be “winners” over others. This can even lead to the adoption of aggressive tactics to persuade Christians who already belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance. Seeking numerical growth at all costs is incompatible with the respect for others required of Christian disciples. Jesus became our Christ not through power or money but through his self-emptying (*kenosis*) and death on the cross. This humble understanding of mission does not merely shape our methods, but is the very nature and essence of our faith in Christ. The church is a servant in God's mission and not the master. The missionary church glorifies God in self-emptying love.
63. The Christian communities in their diversity are called to identify and practise ways of common witness in a spirit of partnership and cooperation, including through mutually respectful and responsible forms of evangelism. Common witness is what the “churches, even while separated, bear together, especially through joint efforts, by manifesting whatever divine gifts of truth and life they already share and experience in common”<sup>9</sup>.
64. The missionary nature of the church also means that there must be a way that churches and para-church structures can be more closely related. The integration of IMC and WCC brought about a new framework for consideration of church unity and mission. While discussions of unity have been very concerned with structural questions, mission agencies can represent flexibility and subsidiarity in mission. While para-church movements can find accountability and direction through ecclesial mooring, para-church structures can help churches not to forget their dynamic apostolic character.
65. The CWME, the direct heir of Edinburgh 1910's initiatives on cooperation and unity, provides a structure for churches and mission agencies to seek ways of expressing and strengthening unity in mission. Being an integral part of the WCC, the CWME has been able to encounter new understandings of mission and unity from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Indigenous churches from all over the globe. In particular, the context of the WCC has facilitated close working relationships with the Roman Catholic Church. A growing intensity of collaboration with Evangelicals, especially with the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Alliance, has also abundantly contributed to the enrichment of ecumenical theological reflection

on mission in unity. Together we share a common concern that the whole church should witness to the whole gospel in the whole world.<sup>10</sup>

66. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of unity, unites people and churches too, to celebrate unity in diversity both proactively and constructively. The Spirit provides both the dynamic context and the resources needed for people to explore differences in a safe, positive and nurturing environment in order to grow into an inclusive and mutually responsible community.

### **God Empowers the Church in Mission**

67. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God indwells the church, empowering and energizing its members. Thus mission becomes for Christians an urgent inner compulsion (1 Cor. 9:16), even a test and criterion for authentic life in Christ, rooted in the profound demands of Christ's love, to invite others to share in the fullness of life Jesus came to bring. Participating in God's mission, therefore, should be natural for all Christians and all churches, not only for particular individuals or specialized groups.<sup>11</sup>

68. What makes the Christian message of God's abundant love for humanity and all creation credible is our ability to speak with one voice, where possible, and to give common witness and an account of the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). The churches have therefore produced a rich array of common declarations, some of them resulting in uniting or united churches, and of dialogues, seeking to restore the unity of all Christians in one living organism of healing and reconciliation. A rediscovery of the work of the Holy Spirit in healing and reconciliation, which is at the heart of today's mission theology, has significant ecumenical implications.<sup>12</sup>

69. While acknowledging the great importance of "visible" unity among churches, nonetheless unity need not be sought only at the level of organizational structures. From a mission perspective, it is important to discern what helps the cause of God's mission. In other words, unity in mission is the basis for the visible unity of the churches which also has implications for the order of the church. Attempts to achieve unity must be in concert with the biblical call to seek justice. Our call to do justice may sometimes involve breaking false unities that silence and oppress. Genuine unity always entails inclusivity and respect for others.

70. Today's context of large-scale worldwide migration challenges the churches' commitment to unity in very practical ways. We are told: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2, NIV). Churches can be a place of refuge for migrant communities; they can also be intentional focal points

for intercultural engagement.<sup>13</sup> The churches are called to be one to serve God's mission beyond ethnic and cultural boundaries and ought to create multi-cultural ministry and mission as a concrete expression of common witness in diversity. This may entail advocating justice in regard to migration policies and resistance to xenophobia and racism. Women, children, and undocumented workers are often the most vulnerable among migrants in all contexts. But, women are also often at the cutting edge of new migrant ministries.

71. God's hospitality calls us to move beyond binary notions of culturally dominant groups as hosts, and migrant and minority peoples as guests. Instead, in God's hospitality, God is host and we are all invited by the Spirit to participate with humility and mutuality in God's mission.

### **Local Congregations: New Initiatives**

72. While cherishing the unity of the Spirit in the one Church, it is also important to honour the ways in which each local congregation is led by the Spirit to respond to their own contextual realities. Today's changed world calls for local congregations to take new initiatives. For example, in the secularizing global North, new forms of contextual mission, such as "new monasticism", "emerging church", and "fresh expressions", have re-defined and re-vitalized churches. Exploring contextual ways of being church can be particularly relevant to young people. Some churches in the global North now meet in pubs, coffee houses, or converted movie theatres. Engaging with church life online is an attractive option for young people thinking in a non-linear, visual, and experiential way.
73. Like the early church in the Book of Acts, local congregations have the privilege of forming a community marked by the presence of the risen Christ. For many people, acceptance or refusal to become members of the church is linked to their positive or negative experience with a local congregation, which can be either a stumbling block or an agent of transformation.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is vital that local congregations are constantly renewed and inspired by the Spirit of mission. Local congregations are frontiers and primary agents of mission.
74. Worship and the sacraments play a crucial role in the formation of transformative spirituality and mission. Reading the Bible contextually is also a primary resource in enabling local congregations to be messengers and witnesses to God's justice and love. Liturgy in the sanctuary only has full integrity when we live out God's mission in our communities in our daily life. Local congregations are therefore impelled to step out of their comfort zones and cross boundaries for the sake of the mission of God.



75. More than ever before, local congregations today can play a key role in emphasizing the crossing of cultural and racial boundaries, and affirming cultural difference as a gift of the Spirit. Rather than being perceived as a problem, migration can be seen as offering new possibilities for churches to re-discover themselves afresh. It inspires opportunities for the creation of intercultural and multicultural churches at local level. All churches can create space for different cultural communities to come together and embrace exciting opportunities for contextual expressions of intercultural mission in our time.
76. Local congregations can also, as never before, develop global connections. Many inspirational and transformative linkages are being formed between churches that are geographically far apart and located in very different contexts. These offer innovative possibilities but are not without pitfalls. The increasingly popular short-term “mission trips” can help to build partnerships between churches in different parts of the world but in some cases place an intolerable burden on poor local churches, or disregard the existing churches altogether. While there is some danger and caution around such trips, these exposure opportunities in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts can also lead to long-term change when the traveller returns to their home community. The challenge is to find ways of exercising spiritual gifts which build up the whole church in every part (1 Cor. 12-14).
77. Advocacy for justice is no longer the sole prerogative of national assemblies and central offices but a form of witness which calls for the engagement of local churches. For example, the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2011) concluded with a plea in the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation that “churches must help in identifying the everyday choices that can abuse and promote human rights, gender justice, climate justice, unity and peace”<sup>15</sup>. Their grounding in everyday life gives local churches both legitimacy and motivation in the struggle for justice and peace.
78. The church in every geo-political and socio-economic context is called to service (*diakonia*)—to live out the faith and hope of the community of God’s people, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ. Through service the church participates in God’s mission, following the way of its Servant Lord. The church is called to be a diaconal community manifesting the power of service over the power of domination, enabling and nurturing possibilities for life, and witnessing to God’s transforming grace through acts of service that hold forth the promise of God’s reign.<sup>16</sup>
79. As the church discovers more deeply its identity as a missionary community, its outward-looking character finds expression in evangelism.

# Spirit of Pentecost: Good News for All

## The Call to Evangelize

80. Witness (*martyria*) takes concrete form in evangelism—the communication of the whole gospel to the whole of humanity in the whole world.<sup>17</sup> Its goal is the salvation of the world and the glory of the Triune God. Evangelism is mission activity which makes explicit and unambiguous the centrality of the incarnation, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ without setting limits to the saving grace of God. It seeks to share this good news with all who have not yet heard it and invites them to an experience of life in Christ.
81. “Evangelism is the outflow of hearts that are filled with the love of God for those who do not yet know him.”<sup>18</sup> At Pentecost, the disciples could not but declare the mighty works of God (Acts 2:4; 4:20). Evangelism, while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional articulation of the gospel, including “the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship”<sup>19</sup>. While the Holy Spirit calls some to be evangelists (Eph. 4:11), we all are called to give an account of the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). Not only individuals but also the whole church together is called to evangelize (Mark 16:15; 1 Pet. 2:9).
82. Today’s world is marked by excessive assertion of religious identities and persuasions that seem to break and brutalize in the name of God rather than heal and nurture communities. In such a context, it is important to recognize that evangelism is not proselytism.<sup>20</sup> The Holy Spirit chooses to work in partnership with peoples’ preaching and demonstration of the good news (cf. Rom. 10:14-15; 2 Cor. 4:2-6), but it is only God’s Spirit who creates new life and brings about rebirth (John 3:5-8; 1 Thess. 1:4-6). We acknowledge that evangelism at times has been distorted and lost its credibility because some Christians have forced “conversions” by violent means or the abuse of power. In some contexts, however, accusations of forceful conversions are motivated by the desire of dominant groups to keep the marginalized living with oppressed identities and in dehumanizing conditions.
83. Evangelism is sharing one’s faith and conviction with other people, inviting them to discipleship, whether or not they adhere to other religious traditions. Such sharing is to take place with both confidence and humility, and as an expression of our professed love for our world. If we claim to love God and to love our fellow human beings but fail to share the good news with them urgently and consistently, we deceive ourselves as to the

integrity of our love for either God or people. There is no greater gift we can offer to our fellow human beings than to share and or introduce them to the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ.

84. Evangelism leads to repentance, faith and baptism. Hearing the truth in the face of sin and evil demands a response—positive or negative (John 4:28-29; cf. Mark 10:22). It provokes conversion, involving a change of attitudes, priorities and goals. It results in salvation of the lost, healing of the sick and the liberation of the oppressed and the whole creation.
85. “Evangelism”, while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional articulation of the gospel, including “the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship”<sup>21</sup>. In different churches, there are differing understandings of how the Spirit calls us to evangelize in our contexts. For some, evangelism is primarily about leading people to personal conversion through Jesus Christ; for others, evangelism is about being in solidarity and offering Christian witness through presence with oppressed peoples; others again look on evangelism as one component of God’s mission. Different Christian traditions denote aspects of mission and evangelism in different ways; however, we can still affirm that the Spirit calls us all toward an understanding of evangelism which is grounded in the life of the local church where worship (*leiturgia*) is inextricably linked to witness (*martyria*), service (*diakonia*) and fellowship (*koinonia*).

### **Authentic Evangelism**

86. Evangelism is sharing the good news both in word and action. Evangelizing through verbal proclamation or preaching of the gospel (*kerygma*) is profoundly biblical. However, if our words are not consistent with our actions, our evangelism is inauthentic. The combination of verbal declaration and visible action bears witness to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and of his purposes. Evangelism is closely related to unity: the love for one another is a demonstration of the gospel we proclaim (John 13:34-35) while disunity is an embarrassment to the gospel (1 Cor. 1).
87. There are historical and contemporary examples of faithful, humble service by Christians, working in their own local contexts, with whom the Spirit has partnered to bring about fullness of life. Also, many Christians who lived and worked as missionaries far away from their own cultural contexts did so with humility, mutuality, and respect; God’s Spirit also stirred in those communities to bring about transformation.

88. Regrettably, sometimes evangelism has been practised in ways which betray rather than incarnate the gospel. Whenever this occurs repentance is in order. Mission in Christ's way involves affirming the dignity and rights of others. We are called to serve others as Christ did (cf. Mark 10:45; Matt. 25:45), without exploitation or any form of allurement.<sup>22</sup> In such individualized contexts, it may be possible to confuse evangelism with buying and selling a "product", where *we* decide what aspects Christian life we want to take on. Instead, the Spirit rejects the idea that Jesus' good news for all can be consumed under capitalist terms, and the Spirit calls us to conversion and transformation at a personal level, which leads us to the proclamation of the fullness of life for all.
89. Authentic evangelism is grounded in humility and respect for all, and flourishes in the context of dialogue. It promotes the message of the gospel, of healing and reconciliation, in word and deed. "There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the message of God's coming reign."<sup>23</sup> Evangelism, therefore, inspires the building of inter-personal and community relationships. Such authentic relationships are often best nourished in local faith communities, and based on local cultural contexts. Christian witness is as much by our presence as by our words. In situations where the public testimony to one's faith is not possible without risking one's life, simply living the gospel may be a powerful alternative.
90. Aware of tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and varied interpretations of Christian witness, authentic evangelism must always be guided by life-affirming values, as stated in the joint statement on "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct":
- a. Rejection of all forms of violence, discrimination and repression by religious and secular authority, including the abuse of power—psychological or social.
  - b. Affirming the freedom of religion to practise and profess faith without any fear of reprisal and or intimidation. Mutual respect and solidarity which promote justice, peace and the common good of all.
  - c. Respect for all people and human cultures, while also discerning the elements in our own cultures, such as patriarchy, racism, casteism, etc., that need to be challenged by the gospel.
  - d. Renunciation of false witness and listening in order to understand in mutual respect.

- e. Ensuring freedom for ongoing discernment by persons and communities as part of decision-making.
- f. Building relationships with believers of other faiths or no faith to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.<sup>24</sup>

91. We live in a world strongly influenced by individualism, secularism and materialism, and other ideologies that challenge the values of the kingdom of God. Although the gospel is ultimately good news for all, it is bad news for the forces which promote falsehood, injustice and oppression. To that extent, evangelism is also a prophetic vocation which involves speaking truth to power in hope and in love (Acts 26:25; Col. 1:5; Eph. 4:15). The gospel is liberative and transformative. Its proclamation must involve transformation of societies with a view to creating just and inclusive communities.
92. Standing against evil or injustice and being prophetic can sometimes be met with suppression and violence, and thus consequently lead to suffering, persecution, and even death. Authentic evangelism involves being vulnerable, following the example of Christ by carrying the cross and emptying oneself (Phil. 2:5-11). Just as the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church under Roman persecution, today the pursuit of justice and righteousness makes a powerful witness to Christ. Jesus linked such self-denial with the call to follow him and with eternal salvation (Mark 8:34-38).

### **Evangelism, Interfaith Dialogue and Christian Presence**

93. In the plurality and complexity of today's world, we encounter people of many different faiths, ideologies and convictions. We believe that the Spirit of Life brings joy and fullness of life. God's Spirit, therefore, can be found in all cultures that affirm life. The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways, and we do not fully understand the workings of the Spirit in other faith traditions. We acknowledge that there is inherent value and wisdom in diverse life-giving spiritualities. Therefore, authentic mission makes the "other" a partner in, not an "object" of mission.
94. Dialogue is a way of affirming our common life and goals in terms of the affirmation of life and the integrity of creation. Dialogue at the religious level is possible only if we begin with the expectation of meeting God who has preceded us and has been present with people within their own contexts.<sup>25</sup> God is there before we come (Acts 17) and our task is not to bring God along, but to witness to the God who is already there. Dialogue provides for an honest encounter where each party brings to the table all that they are in an open, patient and respectful manner.

95. Evangelism and dialogue are distinct but interrelated. Although Christians hope and pray that all people may come to living knowledge of the Triune God, evangelism is not the purpose of dialogue. However, since dialogue is also “a mutual encounter of commitments”, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ has a legitimate place in it. Furthermore, authentic evangelism takes place in the context of the dialogue of life and action, and in “the spirit of dialogue”: “an attitude of respect and friendship”<sup>26</sup>. Evangelism entails not only proclamation of our deepest convictions, but also listening to others, and being challenged and enriched by others (Acts 10).
96. Particularly important is dialogue between people of different faiths, not only in multi-religious contexts but equally where there is a large majority of a particular faith. It is necessary to protect rights of minority groups and religious freedom and to enable all to contribute to the common good. Religious freedom should be upheld because it flows from the dignity of the human person, grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). Followers of all religions and beliefs have equal rights and responsibilities.<sup>27</sup>

## **Evangelism and Cultures**

97. The gospel takes root in different contexts through engagement with specific cultural, political and religious realities. Respect for people and their cultural and symbolic life-worlds are necessary if the gospel is to take root in those different realities. In this way it must begin with engagement and dialogue with the wider context in order to discern how Christ is already present and where God’s Spirit is already at work.
98. The connection of evangelism with colonial powers in the history of mission has led to the presupposition that Western forms of Christianity are the standards by which other’s adherence to the gospel should be judged. Evangelism by those who enjoy economic power or cultural hegemony risks distorting the gospel. Therefore, they must seek the partnership of the poor, the dispossessed and minorities, and be shaped by their theological resources and visions.
99. The enforcement of uniformity discredits the uniqueness of each individual created in the image and likeness of God. Whereas Babel attempted to enforce uniformity, the preaching of the disciples on the day of Pentecost resulted in a unity in which personal particularities and community identities were not lost but respected—they heard the good news in their own languages.

100. Jesus calls us out of the narrow concerns of *our* own kingdom, *our* own liberation and *our* own independence (Acts 1:6) by unveiling to us a larger vision and empowering us by the Holy Spirit to go “to the ends of the earth” as witnesses in each context of time and space to God’s justice, freedom and peace. Our calling is to point all to Jesus, rather than to ourselves or our institutions, looking out for the interests of others rather than our own (cf. Phil. 2:3-4). We cannot capture the complexities of the scriptures through one dominant cultural perspective. A plurality of cultures is a gift of the Spirit to deepen our understanding of our faith and one another. As such, intercultural communities of faith, where diverse cultural communities worship together, is one way in which cultures can engage one another authentically, and where culture can enrich gospel. At the same time, the gospel critiques notions of cultural superiority. Therefore, “the gospel, to be fruitful, needs to be both true to itself and incarnated or rooted in the culture of a people. . . . We need constantly to seek the insight of the Holy Spirit in helping us to better discern where the gospel challenges, endorses or transforms a particular culture”<sup>28</sup> for the sake of life.

## Feast of Life: Concluding Affirmations

101. We are the servants of the Triune God, who has given us the mission of proclaiming the good news to all humanity and creation, especially the oppressed and the suffering people who are longing for fullness of life. Mission—as a common witness to Christ—is an invitation to the “feast in the kingdom of God” (Luke 14:15). The mission of the church is to prepare the banquet and to invite all people to the feast of life. The feast is a celebration of creation and fruitfulness overflowing from the love of God, the source of life in abundance. It is a sign of the liberation and reconciliation of the whole creation which is the goal of mission. With a renewed appreciation of the mission of God’s Spirit, we offer the following affirmations in response to the question posed at the beginning of this document.
102. **We affirm that the purpose of God’s mission is fullness of life (John 10:10) and this is the criterion for discernment in mission.** Therefore, we are called to discern the Spirit of God wherever there is life in its fullness, particularly in terms of the liberation of the oppressed peoples, the healing and reconciliation of broken communities and the restoration of the whole creation. We are challenged to appreciate the life-affirming spirits present in different cultures and to be in solidarity with all those who are involved in the mission of affirming and preserving life. We also

discern and confront evil spirits wherever forces of death and negation of life are experienced.

103. **We affirm that mission begins with God's act of creation and continues in re-creation, by the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit, poured out in tongues of fire at Pentecost, fills our hearts and makes us into Christ's church. The Spirit which was in Christ Jesus inspires us to a self-emptying and cross-bearing life-style and accompanies God's people as we seek to bear witness to the love of God in word and deed. The Spirit of truth leads into all truth and empowers us to defy the demonic powers and speak the truth in love. As a redeemed community we share with others the waters of life and look for the Spirit of unity to heal, reconcile and renew the whole creation.
104. **We affirm that spirituality is the source of energy for mission and that mission in the Spirit is transformative.** Thus we seek a re-orienting of our perspective between mission, spirituality and creation. Mission spirituality that flows from liturgy and worship reconnects us with one another and with the wider creation. We understand that our participation in mission, our existence in creation and our practice of the life of the Spirit are woven together, for they are mutually transformative. Mission that begins with creation invites us to celebrate life in all its dimensions as God's gift.
105. **We affirm that the mission of God's Spirit is to renew the whole creation.** "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1, NIV). The God of life protects, loves and cares for nature. Humanity is not the master of the earth but is responsible to care for the integrity of creation. Excessive greed and unlimited consumption which lead to continuous destruction of nature must end. God's love does not proclaim a human salvation separate from the renewal of the whole creation. We are called to participate in God's mission beyond our human-centred goals. God's mission is to all life and we have to both acknowledge it and serve it in new ways of mission. We pray for repentance and forgiveness, but we also call for action now. Mission has creation at its heart.
106. **We affirm that today mission movements are emerging from the global South and East which are multi-directional and many faceted.** The shifting centre of gravity of Christianity to the global South and East challenges us to explore missiological expressions that are rooted in these contexts, cultures and spiritualities. We need to develop further mutuality and partnership and affirm interdependence within



mission and the ecumenical movement. Our mission practice should show solidarity with suffering peoples and harmony with nature. Evangelism is done in self-emptying humility, with respect toward others and in dialogue with people of different cultures and faiths. It should, in this landscape, also involve confronting structures and cultures of oppression and dehumanization that are in contradiction to the values of God's reign.

107. **We affirm that marginalized people are agents of mission and exercise a prophetic role which emphasizes that fullness of life is for all.** The marginalized in society are the main partners in God's mission. Marginalized, oppressed and suffering people have a special gift to distinguish what news is good for them and what news is bad for their endangered life. In order to commit ourselves to God's life-giving mission, we have to listen to the voices from the margins to hear what is life-affirming and what is life-destroying. We must turn our direction of mission to the actions that the marginalized are taking. Justice, solidarity and inclusivity are key expressions of mission from the margins.
108. **We affirm that the economy of God is based on values of love and justice for all and that transformative mission resists idolatry in the free-market economy.** Economic globalization has effectively supplanted the God of life with mammon, the god of free-market capitalism that claims the power to save the world through the accumulation of undue wealth and prosperity. Mission in this context needs to be counter-cultural, offering alternatives to such idolatrous visions because mission belongs to the God of life, justice and peace and not to this false god who brings misery and suffering to people and nature. Mission, then, is to denounce the economy of greed and to participate in and practise the divine economy of love, sharing and justice.
109. **We affirm that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news in all ages and places and should be proclaimed in the Spirit of love and humility.** We affirm the centrality of the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection in our message and also in the way we do evangelism. Therefore, evangelism is pointing always to Jesus and the kingdom of God rather than to institutions, and it belongs to the very being of the church. The prophetic voice of the church should not be silent in times that demand this voice be heard. The church is called to renew its methods of evangelism to communicate the good news with persuasion, inspiration and conviction.

110. **We affirm that dialogue and cooperation for life are integral to mission and evangelism.** Authentic evangelism is done with respect to freedom of religion and belief, for all human beings as images of God. Proselytism by violent means, economic incentive or abuse of power is contrary to the message of the gospel. In doing evangelism it is important to build relations of respect and trust between people of different faiths. We value each and every human culture and recognize that the gospel is not possessed by any group but is for every people. We understand that our task is not to bring God along but to witness to the God who is already there (Acts 17:23-28). Joining in with the Spirit, we are enabled to cross cultural and religious barriers to work together towards life.
111. **We affirm that God moves and empowers the church in mission.** The church as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit is dynamic and changing as it continues the mission of God. This leads to a variety of forms of common witness, reflecting the diversity of world Christianity. Thus the churches need to be on the move, journeying together in mission, continuing in the mission of the apostles. Practically, this means that church and mission should be united, and different ecclesial and missional bodies need to work together for the sake of life.
112. The Triune God invites the whole creation to the Feast of Life, through Jesus Christ who came “that they may have life, and may have it in all its fullness” (John 10:10, REB), through the Holy Spirit who affirms the vision of the reign of God, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth!” (Is. 65:17, KJV). We commit ourselves together in humility and hope to the mission of God, who recreates all and reconciles all. And we pray, “God of Life, lead us into justice and peace!”

# Being Disciples Means Sharing Good News

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## Learning from History

In the early church, we see the apostles engaged in the work of evangelism (Acts 5:42, 8:25, 15:7). Acts 11:19-21 tells us that all the disciples evangelized as they spread out from Jerusalem. This was not restricted to the apostles: “Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word” (Acts 8:4).

Evangelism was a vital part of the mission of the early church. “Enlighten those in darkness”, intones an early liturgical prayer from Egypt. “Raise up the fallen, strengthen the weak, heal the sick, guide all, good Lord, into the way of salvation and into thy holy flock.” Evangelism was not regarded as the work only of professionals. The second-century pagan critic Celsus complained about the “wool workers, cobblers, laundry workers and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels” who were imparting the story of Jesus and his love to others.

After 381 CE, the church was formally established as the religion of the Roman Empire, with all citizens becoming Christians by default. There was no longer time to catechize and disciple novice Christians. Instruction in ritual and custom virtually replaced instruction in the faith. In a sense, it was no longer necessary to evangelize pagans because there were (in legal terms) no more pagans. This was the turning point at which evangelism began to be professionalized, and professionalization changes our motivation and our means.

This alliance of Christian faith with imperial power also led to a distortion of evangelism, so that it turned into imposing religious identity. In subsequent centuries, Christian faith has often been complicit in the exercise of colonial power. Evangelism has been twisted to become a matter of making the “other” like the colonizer or into a commodity for the colonizer. To make matters worse, imperial forces have been adept at co-opting religion to legitimize prejudice, violence and exploitation. The rise of authoritarian and militaristic political forces in our own time makes this an urgent contemporary challenge.

To recover the integrity of evangelism in today’s diverse global village, it is necessary to disown the model of evangelism as conquest. It is imperative to foster instead inter-religious openness, promoting partnership, dialogue and collaboration with believers of other religious traditions. Then we can redraw the boundary lines of religious differences, so that they become way markers to peace, not battle lines for violence.

Despite the blunting of the church’s evangelistic edge during the Christendom era, there were many isolated attempts to refocus and reinvigorate the mission of the church over the subsequent centuries, often led by new movements disappointed by the church’s lack of priority on mission and evangelism. For example, the Hutterites strongly stressed that every baptized believer

had received the great commission. They were sent as missionaries throughout Europe, often dying for their attempts to share their faith. Similar stories could be told of Celtic monks or Moravian missionaries. But such movements had limited influence on the church as a whole.

## Questions for Reflection

- Who were the agents of evangelism during the time of the early church?
- How was the practice of evangelism affected by the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire?
- What steps might be needed to liberate evangelism from its complicity in alien political projects?

## Learning from the Bible

Evangelism is both a role and an activity, whereas discipleship is an identity and an activity. In the Bible, we see that some are specifically recognized and set aside by the church to be evangelists (Eph. 4:11). But while the Holy Spirit calls some individuals to be evangelists, we are all called to evangelize, to give an account of the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). This hope emerges out of being disciples, the called followers of Jesus (Matt. 9:9; John 1:43), and this identity shapes everything we do. The church, as a collection of God's people in a particular place and time, is called to journey together as disciples and to evangelize together (Mark 16:15; 1 Pet. 2:9), to give a collective narrative of hope.

This evangelism emerges out of an authentic discipleship and, in turn, evangelism requires discipleship as a follow-up to nurture the faith of new believers. We see this pattern in the life and ministry of Jesus. The goal of discipleship is to develop healthy believers who walk by faith, communicate their faith and multiply their faith. Jesus made a practice of spending time with his disciples. This was the essence of his training programme — letting his disciples follow him. Knowledge of Christ was gained by association before it was understood by explanation. For most of his active ministry he ate with his disciples, slept near them and talked with them. Jesus gave himself away to his disciples by imparting to them everything that God had given to him.

We see Paul establishing this same pattern in the ministry of the early church (1 Thess. 2:8). As leaders, it is important for us to grasp that we must disciple in the context of relationship. One reason Jesus had such a lasting impact on his disciples is that he lived the message before them daily. He was both message and method. By walking with Jesus, they saw how he lived his

faith in the real world. He prayed before them. He fed the poor. He had compassion on the multitudes. He healed the sick. In other words, he lived the life that he wanted to reproduce in his disciples.

Jesus spent time teaching and explaining who God is, what God's kingdom looks like and how God is redeeming and will redeem creation. But Jesus did not stop with this verbal explanation. He embodied the gospel and kingdom values through his deeds and healings. He went to those who were outcast and excluded from the community and physically touched them, despite prohibitions from the religious authorities. His words and actions served as signs of God's kingdom and led to transformation, both in the lives of those who were healed and those who served as witnesses. This kingdom, the kingdom of his Father, is about abundant life.

## Questions for Reflection

- In your context is there a holistic approach to ministry, one modelled after Jesus?
- Does your congregation engage in intentional spiritual formation practices for all ages?
- How does your understanding of the gospel shape your method of ministry?
- What message are you conveying to those outside the church through your methods of ministry?

## Evangelism: From Everyone to Everyone

Five hundred years ago Martin Luther caused a revolution whose effects were felt far beyond the Protestant churches that emerged from the Reformation in the 16th century. The translation of the Bible into the common language of the people in each and every context enabled all believers everywhere to engage directly with the word of God. This engagement transformed the worldwide church, and today the Bible, in whole or in part, is available in 3,223 languages. This has been the single most significant development in the history of the church since the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The woman and man in the street, the factory and the field being able to read the word of God, with all its promises and truths, has unleashed the second major wave of growth in the global church after the initial expansion of the early church.

Imagine what could happen if each Christian, in every church across the world, realized that the faith that has transformed their lives is something they can share. They don't need an evangelist to do it, a church leader to sanction it or even a bishop to plan it. They can simply gossip the good news, allowing

the grace they have experienced to bubble over. Such proclamation of the good news is not a self-confident declaration, nor a warning of impending doom, but rather the recounting of an amazing experience with a desire that it may be shared.

The proclamation arises out of thankfulness to God for what he has done in our lives. It is characterized by generosity. As D.T. Niles said, evangelism is one beggar telling another where to find bread. It is expressed joyfully as something that has gladdened the soul. In simple terms it is the recognition of receiving an abundance of grace that is limitless. The grace of God does not work to the rules of the world's economy, depleting as it is shared, but rather the act of sharing makes the experience of its abundance more real.

The context for evangelism also dictates that it must not be the exclusive province of the ordained, the powerful or the educated. One of the great iconoclastic elements of the World Council of Churches' mission affirmation "Together towards Life" is its bold and unequivocal recognition that whereas mission has been understood as taking place from the centre to the margins, now there is a reversal of roles. Indeed, it goes further to recognize that mission is often most effective, radical and profound when it is "mission *from* the margins"<sup>1</sup>.

The ability for those in the margins to do mission demands a priesthood of all believers, something suggested in three recent major mission statements.

In 2010, the Lausanne Movement's "The Cape Town Commitment" stated, "We encourage all believers to accept and affirm their own daily ministry and mission as being wherever God has called them to work. . . . We need intensive efforts to train all God's people in whole-life discipleship, which means to live, think, work, and speak from a biblical worldview and with missional effectiveness in every place or circumstance of daily life and work."<sup>2</sup>

In 2012, "Together towards Life" affirmed that "as the church discovers more deeply its identity as a missionary community, its outward-looking character finds expression in evangelism". It also noted: "All Christians, churches, and congregations are called to be vibrant messengers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the good news of salvation. Evangelism is a confident but humble sharing of our faith and conviction with other people. Such sharing is a gift to others which announces the love, grace, and mercy of God in Christ".<sup>3</sup>

In 2013, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis expressed the conviction that "All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients".<sup>4</sup>

Across the world church we are living through a rediscovery of the reality that the mandate for evangelism is not restricted to any select group, but is given to all disciples of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is from everyone to everyone.

## Questions for Reflection

- Considering recent major mission statements, who do you see as the agents of evangelism?
- How can we resource church members for their evangelistic task?
- How does gossiping translate into other languages? “Have you heard . . . ?”
- Who is responsible and empowered for the work of evangelism in your context?
- Does your congregation regularly create space for people to witness and share their faith?
- Is there a culture of authenticity and vulnerability in your context? Can people freely bring their struggles and concerns to their fellow church members?

## Together for Transformation

In modern and postmodern societies, the church is challenged to engage its members in the mission of the church. One of the main characteristics of these societies is individualism. People are losing and breaking their ties to institutions, including the church. They are increasingly trying to determine the course of their own lives, decreasing the significance and authority of the communities of which they are part, such as families, the places they live and religious institutions. There are also those who search for new forms of spirituality, community and mission outside of the church. How can the church help people understand their own lives and find meaning within their faith tradition; within their communities; within the mission of God?

The call to discipleship invites people on a journey of transformation. This is a journey not just of self-discovery and self-improvement, but also one that transforms and shapes the lives of others; a journey not to be made alone, but with other people. Paul reminds us that we belong together as the body of Christ. We cannot afford to lose the valuable contributions of the other limbs of the body that is the church of God. As individuals, we cannot be the complete body. If we are trying to be healing hands in this world, we will need feet to get to the sick. If we want to be a prophetic voice, we need ears to understand what is going on around us. The mission of God is a mission for his church. As Jesus prayed for the disciples he sent into the world, he prayed for them to be one, like Jesus himself is one with the Father. Mission is participating in this unity, so that the world may believe.

When we engage in discipleship together, we can better understand what it means to be a disciple and to grow as individual disciples. Discipleship is about listening to the voice of God, searching for God's desires and purpose for ourselves and for the world around us. As we try to discern the voice of God and his purpose, it is easy to confuse these with our own desires and needs. We need to engage in discipleship together to really discern our own voices and the voice of God. We need to recognize the Holy Spirit in our fellow Christians, calling us, reminding us, helping us to be authentic disciples.

Such openness to others must also shape our evangelistic engagement. Evangelism seeks to invite a conversion. When it occurs, it is by the work of the Spirit, not the evangelist. But this conversion calls for change in the evangelist as well as the evangelized. It is not to be understood as converting the other to be like me, but that together we are being called toward new life in Christ. In this way, evangelism announces and anticipates a transformation of all of life. It is to enter the dialogue of Creator and creation, expectant and hopeful of mutual transformation and joy. In this is a spirituality of reciprocity and mutuality that recognizes that we are vitally interconnected and needed together as seeds of new life.

In the church, Christian character is formed by participating in the sacraments and sharing the gospel. Even before we move into the world, we bear witness to the gospel by being a community of equality, grace, faith, hope and love. By committing ourselves to a community, we learn to embrace each other, so we learn to embrace the world with the love of God. In individualized societies, the perception of what is important and what is true is being shaped increasingly by personal experience instead of a transfer of tradition, knowledge and facts. Therefore, the church must find ways to let people experience the importance and meaning of being disciples together. Of great importance are baptism and eucharist, both reminding people that they are part of the movement of God's Spirit in this world.

Discipleship can help the church face an experience-driven culture. Discipleship is all about experiencing the things we believe in: the life, grace, love, justice and righteousness of God. If we want people to reconnect to the faith, discipleship is maybe where we start – with the invitation to experience that the truth that is proclaimed in evangelization is the eternal truth, as true today as it has always been. When we are on the journey of discipleship, it is not a matter of institutional conformity, but rather an adventure of discovery as we encourage one another on the way of Christ.

Another vital starting place in today's context is recognizing that mission is from the margins. In a divided and unequal world, the gospel of Christ continues to rise from the margins and challenge the mighty to lay down their power and make way for the coming of justice. The gospel of Christ breaks out from communities that are despised but that turn out to be the most important of all. Indigenous peoples continue to suffer discrimination and exploitation at



the hands of the powerful, yet their wisdom may hold the key to the future. Despite advances in gender awareness worldwide, women continue to be treated unequally and to suffer painfully at the hands of male power. Minority groups in many contexts experience discrimination, their culture and their very humanity treated with scant respect.

Evangelism today is alert to the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world. Initiative lies with those who have been excluded by the systemic injustices of the prevailing global system. Those who are cast out to the margins can become agents of transforming evangelism. Those whom the gospel is recreating as first fruits of the new heaven and earth are then witnesses against the elitist heaven and despoiled earth embodied by worldly empires. In this respect, evangelism turns the status quo upside down. It subverts the political and religious powers that deny the dignity, diversity and preciousness of all God's creation. It invites all these relationships and systems into a new orientation toward fullness of life. As we live out our discipleship of Christ, we are together for transformation.

## Questions for Reflection

- With what gifts has God blessed you and your church through your fellow Christians in your community?
- Can you think of a time in your life when God has used people around you to discern the voice of God?
- Do you find it difficult to commit yourself to a Christian community of people different from you?
- Who are the marginalized, and how does our discipleship relate to the marginalized?
- What is the role of marginalized people in conveying the message of the coming of the reign of God today?
- What role do baptism and eucharist have in your church as an experience of community?
- How is your church giving opportunities to young people?

## Embracing Our Context

Identifying with the Christian faith and seeking to be a disciple of Jesus is inherently contextual. Christianity differs from the other Abrahamic faiths in that the Islamic and Jewish faiths rely on texts that contain God's words to humanity that are preserved in the delivered languages. A large part of those

religions is devoted to preserving a certain fixed culture that is timeless and not based on location. The Christian faith, by contrast, does not speak through text alone. Christianity is an incarnational faith. God became human. Divinity was translated into a humanity that was not generalized for all times and places. God became a person in a particular location and in a particular ethnic group and at a particular place and time. The translation of God into humanity was under very culture-specific conditions.

Therefore, the translation of the gospel is not about a specific programme or a uniform substitution of something old for something new in every setting. Rather, it is about the turning and transforming of what is already there to point to God and God's redeeming work in the world. Much of Jesus' teaching was correcting and clarifying the places where tradition and religion had superseded relationship with God and neighbour. The Word made flesh can and does speak in any language and to the complex experiences and relationships that form our social identities whenever and wherever we find ourselves. The hard task for us is to understand the culture where we serve and the places where the gospel of love, hope and peace needs to be spoken.

Therefore, context is extremely important when discerning a congregation's unique calling and charge in the community. Part of our evangelistic task is to see the world as God sees it, both how it currently is and how God desires it to be. Through that lens, we can name and begin to work in the gap between the current reality and the values and characteristics of the kingdom of God. These gaps, needs and places where life is diminished will look different in different contexts. The unique gifts and strengths to meet and speak into the gaps will also vary among congregations, even those from the same tradition, in the same community. Every part of the body of Christ, both individually and communally, has something to contribute to God's kingdom work.

Being alert to context also increases our awareness of cultural diversity. In Revelation 7:9-10, in John's vision of the future, the consummation of God's reign is marked by diversity, multiculturalism, multilingualism and interculturality. Interaction with other people from other cultures with different languages assumes a reciprocal and respectful relationship that values their cultural identity and is willing to learn and be enriched in the light of their different traditions. In Acts 2, we read of the powerful coming of the Holy Spirit upon Christ's disciples, enabling them to speak the wonders of God in the many languages of the world. Today more than ever, the sharing of the good news cannot be done without the sensitivity, vision and practice of interculturality. Evangelism must be marked by mutual respect, affirmation of linguistic and cultural identity, reciprocal learning, sharing and enhancing our lives and our worlds. This is applicable to the people of God worldwide in the West, East, North and South!

## Questions for Reflection

- Where are the places in your community where people are unable to experience abundant kingdom life?
- What strengths and gifts in your congregation can partner with God in bridging the gap?
- In reflecting on your faith community, are all ages regularly taught the tenets of the faith and given the opportunity to become familiar with the Bible?
- Does your congregation regularly engage in acts of loving neighbour and creation as a response to the love and grace of God they have experienced in their own lives?
- Is there a regular practice of looking for and naming signs of transformation and God's kingdom breaking out in your community?
- What opportunities do you have to learn from those whose culture is very different from your own?

## Costly but Joyful

*Kenosis*, or self-emptying, is the way Jesus Christ exemplified his dominion during his earthly ministry (Phil. 2:5-11). Evangelism as authentic discipleship is meant to be a kenotic engagement, which has manifold implications. Kenotic evangelism/discipleship implies that there is no room for self-projection or craze for fame and name for oneself. Such self-seeking ministries of evangelism go against the spirit of *kenosis* and hence are not authentic acts of evangelism. “Together towards Life” reminds us that there is “a global system of mammon that protects the unlimited growth of wealth of only the rich and powerful through endless exploitation. This tower of greed is threatening the whole household of God. The reign of God is in direct opposition to the empire of mammon”<sup>5</sup>. It is in giving up power, wealth, luxury, selfishness, etc. that one finds real joy, not in accumulating and using them for one's own selfish ends. This also challenges the culture of the “prosperity gospel”, which tends to interpret accumulation of undue wealth and luxurious lifestyles as blessings from God. Hence, joyous evangelism that is kenotic must be a countercultural act that resists the logic of free market-oriented globalization and its product of mammon.

While the appeal of the prosperity gospel is understandable in situations where people are losing out economically and where it strikes a chord with traditional religion and culture, it undermines the integrity of evangelism when it becomes a tool with which to extract resources from the poor in order to benefit the few. When the promise of material blessings is predicated on payment

of scarce funds to the church and its ministers, then the integrity of evangelism is at stake. The rise of deliverance ministries, where prophetic leaders claim the power to free people from evil forces in return for goods and services, has further exposed Christian evangelists to the suspicion that they are using their ministry as a vehicle for personal enrichment—a far cry from the *kenosis* to which Christ calls us.

Another aspect of kenotic discipleship is that evangelism, which can be a noisy affair, becomes a matter of listening, deep listening—attending to the realities around us and to those who are living counter to them. This enables us to discern where Jesus is announcing his near presence and kingdom. This nearness of the kingdom is vital to out-dreaming the complicities and injustices of the present. This is to question all the claims of political, cultural, racial and religious voices that say there is no alternative to their way.

*Kenosis* also has ecological ramifications vis-à-vis authentic discipleship and evangelism. Over the years, Christians have misused the biblical notion of “dominion” to rule over the rest of creation without placing dominion alongside *kenosis*, which is the way Christ exercised his “dominion”. As disciples of Christ, we are meant to follow suit. While it is true that humanity has been given dominion over non-human creation, we are expected to exercise it in the spirit of Christ, by giving it up for the sake of creation. When St Francis of Assisi exemplified it in his life and ministry by preaching the gospel of salvation to the whole creation, including plants and animals, it was truly an act of joyous evangelism and authentic discipleship. In an age of alarming environmental catastrophe, the ecological dimensions of *kenosis* must be taken seriously.

Since God created everything, even that which is inside of our Mother Earth, if we must extract those resources—oil, natural gas, coal, uranium, copper and other minerals—we must do it with respect and in ways that do not harm other members of creation. The reason for extraction is an energy addiction; we feel that we cannot live without the fossil fuels that harm our environment. However, as convenient as those fossil fuels are, it would be better to instead look at alternative forms of energy production, such as wind and solar power, and practise good conservation.

God has given us the responsibility to care for the earth, its natural resources and our environment. We have much to learn from Indigenous people who have demonstrated a greater level of respect for our Mother Earth, recognizing that pollution from the use of fossil fuels and other mineral extractions does not bring honour and is not beneficial to nature and the long-term survival of the inhabitants of the earth. If evangelism is to bring good news today, it needs to entail the *kenosis* that puts the long-term sustainability of the earth ahead of our own short-term comfort and convenience.

*Kenosis* is integrally related to necrosis. Self-denial and cross-bearing are two essential aspects of authentic discipleship (Mark 8:34). These are not about certain acts of self-mortification or curbing of certain desires of the body

through some rigorous self-discipline. As German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, it is about being other-centric, being oriented toward those who are poor and marginalized. It is when we are in solidarity with those who are suffering and when we share the pain of love for the other that we meaningfully empty ourselves and bear the cross. In this sense, discipleship is a costly affair. It stands in contradiction to the cheap grace that is experienced in ministries of evangelism that are self-seeking, consumerist and prosperity-oriented, as there is hardly any cost involved there. When we offer solidarity to others in their struggle for justice, we also share both their pain and joy (hope for a better tomorrow) through the gospel.

Today, in many parts of the world, especially where Christians are a minority presence, authentic evangelism is indeed a costly commitment, as was the case for the early church under the Roman Empire. To defy the imperial dictate that every citizen should declare the emperor as Lord was a supreme act of evangelical commitment. They knew that it could cost them their lives. By refusing to worship the emperor and the empire, the early church exemplified costly discipleship.

Today, empires are striking back in new avatars, with their own dictatorial requirements of allegiance to mammon, market, militarism, fascism and fundamentalism. Bearing the cross implies a willingness to confront the logic of the empire and to lay down our lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel. In other words, in today's world, martyrdom continues to be an expression of joyous evangelism, as was reflected poignantly in the widely publicized execution of 21 Coptic Orthodox Christians on the Mediterranean coast near Sirte in Libya by ISIS terrorists in 2015. These Egyptian migrant workers died with prayers to Jesus on their lips, teaching us all the joy of costly discipleship. This is a supreme expression of "joyous evangelism" which is kenotic and cross-bearing. As Bonhoeffer would put it, it is about keeping close to Jesus Christ.

## Questions for Reflection

- How do we address the growing tendency toward self-propagation and the pursuit of individual prosperity in our evangelism ministries and counter this with a vision and agenda of a costly discipleship that is self-emptying and other-oriented?
- How can we fulfil our evangelistic calling in ways that are ecologically responsible, expressing our responsibility to care for the earth?
- Can we lift up some specific examples of "martyrdom" as costly discipleship from our own contexts and reflect on and celebrate them as examples of joyous evangelism?

## Being Disciples, Sharing Good News

If we wish evangelism to be convincing today, the first thing we must do is to be disciples. There is a life to be lived. There is a way to be followed. The integrity and authenticity of our discipleship *is* our evangelism. As “Together towards Life” suggests: “Life in the Holy Spirit is the essence of mission, the core of why we do what we do and how we live our lives”<sup>6</sup>. It is as we live this life in the Spirit, as we walk the path of being Christ’s disciples, that we will become true evangelists. Self-emptying, humility and sacrifice are urgently needed today to liberate the gospel from captivity to projects of self-aggrandizement. The more we are true disciples of Christ, the more effective our evangelism will be.

# Together on the Path: Called to Transforming Discipleship

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## Introduction

God's people are invited to a pilgrimage of faith to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world. This is a message of abundant life, hope and renewal.<sup>1</sup>

Missional formation is about equipping Christ's followers to share this good news. It is not "a lunchbox"<sup>2</sup>, a matter of providing ready-made formulas and answers, but rather a process of learning and transformation. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples encountered the risen Jesus. He did not approach them with coercive power or mighty manifestations, but gently led them to understand their faith and their missional vocation (Luke 24:13-35). The encounter between Jesus and the disciples on the road led to a meal of communion, after which they were sent out to spread the good news.

Missional formation is also about discovering the connection between discipleship, leadership and guidance. All disciples of Christ are called to guide others to him and to an ever-deepening understanding of the gospel. We need Christian leaders who defend and support freedom of religion and tolerance in politics and economy. As Christians, they may be guides for others, so their responsibility within society to lead toward freedom of religion and opinion is important.

Christian leadership is not a matter of dominion and lordship over others. When people share their knowledge and experiences, it is possible to have a common commitment to participate in the breaking in of the reign of God in this world (Luke 22:25-26). Like the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, we are affirmed and challenged to be transformed in the power of the Holy Spirit through encountering God in his word (John 4:4-42). This transformation leads us to affirm the values and identities of others as well as to challenge powers of evil and structures of oppression.

The gospel is transmitted to the world in earthen vessels—as followers of Christ, we are called to this task with all our weaknesses and shortcomings. It is not by the splendour of the messenger that the gospel attracts, but by God's endless love and grace (Zech. 4:6). The discrepancy between the beauty of the message and the imperfection of the messengers should make disciples/leaders humble and repentant. Mission in Christ's way is a mission of *kenosis*, or self-emptying, in which believers are constantly called to turn away from hubris to serve the world in bold humility (Phil. 2:7).

The comprehensive nature of the call to discipleship brings a challenge also to theological education. Even in academic work the vision of transforming discipleship cannot be reduced to a merely intellectual exercise. Intellectual rigour and the highest academic standards must be applied to developing a

curriculum that invites us to personal engagement that is life-giving. Academic rigour contributes to a formation that is comprehensive in reaching the roots of our being and the depths of our contemporary crisis. Those who hear the call to the journey of transformed discipleship need to be ready to participate in a transformative journey in the power of the Spirit as the distinctive notes of Christian discipleship strike chords in hearts and minds.

## Formation in the Spirit of Mission

As Christians, we have to confess that we often have seen mission and evangelism as a way of manipulating other people into our own likeness, while the goal of mission should be to call the whole creation to abundant life in inclusive community.<sup>3</sup> Others are not to be transformed into our likeness, but into the likeness of the Creator (Gen. 1:27). Conversion is not only a momentary event of turning to Christ, it is a daily process of *metanoia*, or change of mind (Mark 1:15). God's power helps us to turn away from our selfish selves, to empty ourselves, because if we are full of ourselves, there is no space for the Spirit. The light of the Spirit can shine through us only when it is not blocked by self-centredness. Missional formation has sometimes been misdirected by human sinful agendas that block the flow of God's light through the people of God.

We are invited to embark on a journey of transformation, a journey that at one and the same time is personal, ecclesial, prophetic and missional. "Mission, then, is much more than the work we do; in itself it becomes a means of ongoing transformation of our own lives", writes theological educator Madge Karecki.

Mission leads us into a more profound sharing in the paschal mystery of Christ. It makes possible a kenotic participation in this mystery of the humility of God made visible in Jesus the Christ as we allow ourselves to be broken and poured out for others in the service of mission. This kind of spirituality, which is not for the faint-hearted, can be embraced only through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

This vision of discipleship is geared to the formation of believers and leaders who are equipped not only intellectually, but particularly at the level of spiritual discernment and personal transformation. It fosters a radical openness to the Spirit of God which finds expression in leadership marked by mutuality, reciprocity, humility and interdependence. It provokes a radical openness to others that is life-affirming and profound in its integrity. This openness and humility have clear implications: rich and poor are respected in the same way; men and women have the same dignity and rights. In this vision, there is no discrimination based on different cultures, origins and gender.



Christ's call to discipleship provokes a spiritual engagement. It seeks to promote a response that can spring only from deep in the heart: a sense of commitment, of commitment to mission. It aims to leave us with a sense of having been called, a sense of having been sent, a sense of having been empowered. It seeks to cultivate the kind of discipleship that will be transforming for both the disciples and the situations in which they are set.

Missional formation needs to prepare us for confident Christian witness where others are encountered with an open mind. Therefore, formation needs to prepare us for spiritual discernment where the basic values of the reign of God—faith, hope and love—serve as the basis. These three are integrated, so that faith that is simply holding true in a narrow manner but lacks the horizons of hope and is not incarnated as love is not the goal of missional formation. Likewise, hope that is not informed by faith and guided by love is in danger of turning into groundless utopia or ruthless bigotry. Love that lacks hope and faith, in turn, has a poor chance of survival.

### **Consequences for Missional Formation**

- Academic and professional missional formation needs to emphasize personal spiritual transformation together with academic discipline.
- Congregational life needs to be geared toward missional formation of the congregants in the spirit of respect and tolerance.
- Academic, professional and congregational missional formation needs to emphasize justice in terms of gender, social standing and cultural or religious background.
- Missional formation needs to equip Christians with tools of spiritual discernment to assess (alleged) gifts of the Spirit in the light of the basic values of the reign of God.

### **Formation of Mission from the Margins**

The reality of the world today calls for transformation. As “Together towards Life” affirms, “Mission spirituality resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics, and even our churches”<sup>5</sup>. Today’s world—where so many face the ravages of climate change, fear of the other, uncontrolled conflicts, violence and displacement, unrelenting poverty and the merciless domination of market forces—is a world that cries out for transformation. There is a need for the kind of authentic discipleship that will offer, and live out, convincing answers to that cry. It needs to be undertaken, however, with ears open to the cries of anguish that come from so many of our contemporaries and eyes open to the causes of their suffering.

Today, when the biosphere is facing unprecedented and possibly irreparable climate change with enormous destruction and risks involved, we urgently need to turn to First Nations peoples for guidance. These peoples have often been despised and neglected by the ecclesial, political and economic powers that be. Yet their deeply rooted, respectful and spiritual relationship to nature and its resources is one from which the whole of humankind needs to learn. The affirmation of “our spiritual connection with creation”<sup>6</sup>, for example in many African and Asian contexts, is “a new conversion (*metanoia*) in our mission”<sup>7</sup>. A spirituality of relation to the material world and even to our own bodies is not an add-on to Christianity; it belongs at the very core of the Christian life because this world was created by God and is good (Gen. 1:31).

Affirmation of life in abundance is an inherent dimension of Christian mission and a key to authentic missional formation. An important dimension of this abundant life is that life is not compartmentalized, something strongly expressed through the spiritual riches of many African traditions. The Swahili term *uzima* captures this understanding, much like *shalom* of the Hebrew Bible. It means salvation (as in the Apostles’ Creed), adulthood, health, fullness and wholeness. Life cannot be divided into spiritual and secular realms as was imagined in the post-Enlightenment West. Rather, all life is sacred and under God’s governance. Therefore, in missional formation, we must not lose sight of integral mission where all the spheres of life are in view.

The life of discipleship cannot be lived in the abstract. It can, and must, be lived in the concrete reality of the world in which disciples are placed. In the words of Henri Nouwen, “[Jesus’] appearance in our midst has made it undeniably clear that changing the human heart and changing human society are not separate tasks, but are as interconnected as the two beams of the cross.”<sup>8</sup> As Pope Francis has said, “No one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society”<sup>9</sup>. To be a disciple is to be engaged with realities such as the rise of populist politics, a post-truth age, the revival of racism and xenophobia, corporate greed, inequality and injustice in the global economy and threats to the integrity of the earth itself. Behind all of these forces are powerful vested interests that will not take kindly to being challenged. Transformative discipleship is going to be costly.

We Christians have to confess that in our zeal for mission, we often have missed the seeds of the word (the *logos spermatikos* identified by church father Justin Martyr) in other peoples’ cultures. In this way, we often convert an opportunity of real exchange and mutual inter-religious and intercultural learning about the riches of God’s love into a one-sided propagation of our ideologies, values and customs. Respect, affirmation and recognition of people in all cultures and religions “must begin with engagement and dialogue with the wider context in order to discern how Christ is already present and where

God's Spirit is already at work"<sup>10</sup>. This is so because Christian faith is not salvation from the world, but salvation in and of the world.

The gospel is always expressed in and through a culture. Contextualization or inculturation is an organic process in faith communities whereby the Christian faith finds intelligible and relevant expressions.<sup>11</sup> As the pace of change throughout the world is accelerating, contextualization of the gospel continues to be a pressing issue. The speed of cultural change is such that a close study of contextual processes in situations where Christian witness takes root in local contexts for the first time can equip the churches with valuable lessons. In this sense, many churches of the global South are in an advantageous position because of the relatively recent arrival of the gospel in their contexts. Churches of the global North have a lot to gain from listening carefully to the experiences of the global South in a spirit of mutual learning.

Attention needs to be paid also to the many categories of margins within the church that are able to challenge the often male-dominated and fixed ways of our churches. Therefore, every Christian and every part of the global body of Christ are invited to participate in mission. In order that mission be transformed, missionaries and missional formation need to be transformed. Every Christian is called to be a missionary of the triune God, and thus missional formation is a task of the whole church to all her members, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, culture, social standing, abilities, legal or health status and sexual orientation.

The economic inequality between different parts of the global body of Christ complicates the living out of Christian love in inter-church relationships. Rich churches often perceive that they are carrying out their missionary task when assisting sister churches with material resources. In this view, the receiving churches are seen as objects of mission. This approach is ethnocentric and colonial and hampers a deeper understanding of unity and mission. Churches, as communities of saints, are called to participate in God's mission in the world. When these relationships are without reciprocity, it can result in unjust relationships built on false notions of superiority and inferiority constructed through financial inequality. At a practical level, the wealthy donor churches of the global North often seek to control the use of the funds they have donated to economically poorer churches in the global South. Christians are a worldwide family of God's children, and transparency and accountability need to be mutual and global. Missional formation has to strongly endorse the equality of all churches and Christians. Yet legitimate concerns about faithful stewardship of churches' resources must not be silenced under the pretext of opposing colonialism. The members of the poorer churches also have the right to see that the resources of their churches, local or foreign, are justly accounted for.

## Consequences for Missional Formation

- Missional formation needs to be based on mission theology, rejecting the dichotomies that create a gap between humanity and nature, soul and body or us and them.
- Missional formation needs to be carried out in a manner that is sensitive, yet critical, to the context of mission—cultural, social, economic and religious.
- Just as it is difficult to see neat dichotomies in any context, it is critical that missional formation be open to the complexities of contexts, including the margins. In awareness of the intricacies of human communities, missional formation is especially invited to be discerning to the most vulnerable.

## Formation as Disciples: A Matter of Community

In a world that prizes individuality, at a time when society is increasingly atomized, and in a context where people are polarized by identity politics, Christ calls his disciples to community. Their repentance finds expression as they move away from a self-centred life and find fulfilment in generous self-giving—the way of Christ. They grow in faith as they share together in worship, fellowship, hospitality and service. The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control—finds expression in the context of community. There is much to learn from African communities that put a premium on the relational dimension of life.

The spirit of mission inspires local congregational life to become a “hermeneutic of the gospel”<sup>12</sup>. The Spirit offers resources to leaders and members, invited guests of a hospitable God, while walking with God through Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). In spaces of worship, sacraments and reading religious texts, the Spirit empowers and encourages participants to cross boundaries inside and outside local congregations. Although local congregations can also be frontiers, they are primary agents of missional transformation; they “play a crucial role in the formation of transformative spirituality and mission”<sup>13</sup>. Through the Spirit, leaders and members are enabled and empowered to cross boundaries and receive gifts from God and share the gifts in processes and practices of conversion and missional formation.

The Spirit facilitates the pathways of missional formation and conversion (*metanoia*) of leaders and members through transformative encounters:

- **Becoming and being a community of disciples**—“a community marked by the presence of the risen Christ” and “constantly renewed

and inspired by the Spirit of mission” to welcome and include those who aspire to become members of the church<sup>14</sup>;

- **Viewing missional formation as a type of new conversion**—being open to and pursuing self-discovery and renewal of missionaries and missional identities and practices amidst migration and social diversity by embracing, together with others, “opportunities for contextual expressions of intercultural mission”<sup>15</sup>;
- **Providing opportunities and challenges of new conversions**—mapping “long-term change” of a local congregation by establishing “inspirational and transformative” local and global connections with groups that reflect the diversity in a congregation and community, for example, short-term mission projects<sup>16</sup>;
- **Cultivating a liberating and transformative community of disciples**—witnessing by engaging in advocacy for justice and peace; becoming and being a “diaconal community manifesting the power of service over the power of domination”<sup>17</sup>.

Therefore, the Spirit indwells in the liturgy and in “the liturgy after the liturgy”<sup>18</sup> and shapes the quests for life, justice and service as well as identity formations through which “the church discovers more deeply its identity as a missionary community”<sup>19</sup>. The presence of the Spirit in local and global boundary-crossing contexts provides additional and new resources in the world. The liturgical practices, reading and reflecting on texts together with others, create spaces within which to initiate and (re)frame the responses of disciples as God’s guests and agents participating in God’s mission in the world of cultures and religions in the global South and North.

Regrettably, the church has not always lived up to its calling to be an agent and a model of the transformation that Christ brings. Too often the church has been moulded instead by prevailing patterns of the surrounding world, its leaders seeking power and wealth for themselves rather than modelling the sacrificial service seen in Christ. Today we urgently need church leaders who are, first and foremost, disciples, walking in the Spirit, forming and guiding communities that take the way of Christ. Too often churches have been comfortable clubs for “people like us” and have been easily used to assert the interests of one identity set against others. Today we urgently need churches that break down the dividing walls of hostility and practise radical hospitality, living out the reconciliation and unity promised by Christ and forged by the Spirit. Too often churches have been inward-looking and preoccupied with their own internal concerns. Today we urgently need churches that are mainly and foremost missionary churches<sup>20</sup>, agents of the Spirit in the transformation of the world. All of this calls for formation, an intentional journey of becoming disciples together.

## Consequences for Missional Formation

- Missional formation is by its nature communal.
- Missional formation needs to be based on local faith communities (parishes, congregations) that are globally minded and connected.
- Missional formation should aim at local parishes and congregations, transforming them into self-critical communities that are in solidarity with the surrounding societies.

## Formation to Proclaim the Good News to All

When we consider current trends in our global context, it is apparent that disciples of Christ are on a collision course with powerful forces. Their discipleship is going to be costly. Yet it may be that their minority view will hold the key to the future. As Martin Luther King, Jr suggested a generation ago,

Our planet teeters on the brink of atomic annihilation; dangerous passions of pride, hatred, and selfishness are enthroned in our lives; truth lies prostrate on the rugged hills of nameless calvaries; and men do reverence before false gods of nationalism and materialism. The saving of our world from pending doom will come, not through the complacent adjustment of the conforming majority, but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority.<sup>21</sup>

Here is where discipleship extends beyond the politics of protest or the energy of activism. Grounded in God's infinite, costly love for the world, it is equipped to give and keep on giving, to suffer and keep on suffering, to persevere and keep on persevering. Every disappointment, every false dawn, every reversal can be met with the hope and courage that disciples derive from their faith. They have counted the cost and are ready to carry their cross, come what may.

One of the goals of missional formation needs to be the cultivation of an inclusive ethics that turns enemies into friends. Christ's open arms on the cross welcome everyone in the community of the suffering, dead and risen Lord. A comprehensive orientation to the mission of God calls for a welcoming and hospitable way of life that is affirmative and bridge-building. People of other faiths, even if they would wish to remain in their religious communities, also are to be welcomed in the process of learning and formation. Inter-religious encounters and the mutual learning they offer need to be a part of missional formation and not only mission itself. Therefore, theological education and congregational learning processes need to be implemented in a manner that enables an integrated inter-religious participation without compromising Christian identity.

Money is a potent means of regulating power relations between humans and between humans and nature. Economic power relations are often asymmetrical and contribute to the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Poverty, together with climate change, contributes toward the destruction of the environment, which is visible in the surroundings of this conference. As Christians, we are therefore called to challenge exploitative economic structures and to commit ourselves to seeking viable alternatives, while acknowledging that the economy is one of the areas where avarice, one of the typical human sins, is constantly evident. This does not, however, make the economy a damned sphere where faith has no place. On the contrary, the Zacchaeuses of today are called to descend from their positions and become a part of God's people who are transformed by the gospel and transforming the world (Luke 19:1-10).

The good news will always bring love, justice, peace and harmony to humble people exploited by systems of economic, social and political injustice. Christian witness involves confronting those systems, questioning and fighting unjust systems—just as Jesus did. A mission in this paradigm will be well-received in many contexts, since in our times we see struggles against unjust systems growing stronger. If missionaries come to support and advocate for those processes of liberation, healing and light, speaking the very language of Jesus and of the people, we will see the emergence of an integral, intercultural mission. Such a mission will recognize the presence of God as a God of justice fighting together with his people for their liberation, so that they may stand up and be valued as sons and daughters of God on equal terms as human beings.

Alert to these contextual realities, our formation as disciples is built on the conviction that “evangelism is mission activity that makes explicit and unambiguous the centrality of the incarnation, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ without setting limits to the saving grace of God”<sup>22</sup>. Formation as disciples will equip us to share our lives and beliefs openly and respectfully with those who do not hold our faith, learning from them and sharing with them.

## **Consequences for Missional Formation**

- Believers of other faiths should be invited to join the processes of missional formation in order to learn from them, in order that they may participate in the transformative processes of the formation and in order to create bridges between religions.
- Missional formation needs to be geared toward liberation of the oppressed—this is a way of including both the oppressed and the oppressors, because the latter also are victims of structural sin that binds them.
- Missional formation needs to pay special attention to inclusive language, not only in terms of gender, but also so that the Christian message is expressed in intelligible and palatable language, reaching beyond the insiders of churches and theological debates.

# Moving in the Spirit—Called to Transforming Discipleship

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## *Theological Reflections from the Margins*

### **Mission from the Margins: Introduction and Critique**

In the Pacific, as in other regions of the world, marginalized groups like Indigenous peoples are familiar and agree with the claim that God put origin stories in our cultures. From these stories we gain theological knowledge and understanding. Such origin stories are meta-narratives that reflect the biblical creation story of the Hebrew culture. Some of those origin stories are referred to here. They form a useful framework to contextualize theology that is culturally appropriate for the people of the margins.

Theological reflections from the margins are characteristically concerned with questions such as:

1. How does this particular story reflect real life experiences?
2. Is this particular idea or thought relevant to the life experiences of the common or average person?
3. How does this idea or thought influence our way of ministry or sharing of the good news of Christ?
4. What about the questions where the answers are not clear or known? Are we even asking the right questions?

As theologians from the margins representing the WCC programmatic areas of Disability, Indigenous, Migration-Multicultural Ministry and Racial Justice, we want to resist being marginalized by labels. Rather, we embrace the Indigenous ceremonial invitation to inclusive community. Here, our message and our stories are not just presented in written words, but expressed in all our senses to invite inclusion.

We insist that the place of encounter between peoples is the centre of mission; it is God's space. It is the place of the heart—the centre of our lives where transforming discipleship happens. We do not want to argue for this or that, but to listen to each other and hear the voice of God speaking to all of us. We are reminded that the powers kept pushing Jesus to the margin just as he kept



inviting them there. The margins are the heart of the matter, where matters of the heart mean something.

At the margins there is sometimes holy disruption. Visions are seen by prophets from the wilderness, voices speak from heaven at the river, and people walk on water in the middle of a lake in a storm. Even the power centres are disrupted by grace from the margins. The margins are grace-filled space and are transforming places to be.

The margins include Pacific islands where, in spite of God's promise to Noah that a similar flood will not destroy again, the land is disappearing, with homes and churches in danger of being submerged. The margins are places where the consequences of human action occur, and the voice of God must speak and be heard. The questions are many:

- How will we provide for people who cannot walk when their homes are destroyed by flood?
- What do those who cannot see say about the problems we face?

We speak with the WCC's Mission from the Margins Working Group:

We are called to be amongst God's Peoples  
As Holy Spirit transforming disciples  
Mutually accompanying one another in a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace  
That those long silenced may exercise their agency,  
That resources are appreciated and shared,  
That the wounded are healed and made whole,  
That structural injustices are eliminated,  
That gifts and opportunities are celebrated,  
And modes of human inter-connection are normative  
As we all move together towards life in Christ.

(This statement was created at the inaugural meeting of the Mission from the Margins Working Group, November 2016, Stony Point Center, N.Y., and adapted in October 2017 at Trinity College, Auckland, Aotearoa NZ.)

## Reflection 1: Matthew 14:23-33

Mission from the margins paints a wonderful picture of the church receiving energy and help from those pushed to the edges of society. Another metaphor is of a little boat on a vast restless sea as seen in Matthew 14:22-33, where Jesus comes to the disciples walking on the stormy sea.

We, disciples of Jesus, often see ourselves in a beautiful little boat with a red cross on the sails, battered by the winds and waves of chaos, bringing Jesus to people on the edges of the lake. But when we look around, Christ is not in

the boat with us. There is something scary out there, coming closer! It is Jesus, but we do not recognize him because he is dancing on the sea where we never expected him. We only recognize him if we are open to experience him in strange and peculiar places.

### **Our Own Origin Stories**

The early followers of Jesus interpreted their experience of Christ in the light of the thoughts and teachings about God that they knew best—the teachings of the Jewish people. Early Christians did not always agree about how to use the Jewish scriptures, and indeed we still struggle.

Since God created the world and all its people, then surely God cannot only have been in contact with one group of people who wandered around the Middle East. He must have communed with all his people made in his own image.

All our cultures contain stories that can deepen our understanding of God. The Māori origin stories (included here) that depict darkness as a creative space can help us rethink our rigid frameworks where we marginalize some as completely evil. Teachings within our culture that bring us closer to loving God and all God's creation, including our neighbours, are God's wisdom.

Are we able to open our eyes, which are screwed tight by fear, to recognize God when he comes to us walking on the waters of human experience?

### **The World of the Young**

It can be difficult to learn from young people. As with adults, youth are not a homogenous group. Some are quiet, modest, well-dressed souls who respect the wisdom of their elders and are willing to help carry out their tasks. But the others! Who are these youth who speak an alien language, wear peculiar clothes, do strange things to their hair, listen to incomprehensible music and who just have no respect? Some adults are so easily scandalized, until they see an old picture of themselves, way back then, looking and acting like these youth!

Young people experience a world which is not the world of adults and take for granted things which for many adults are still new. If there are to be mutual intergenerational relationships with young people, then adults need to listen, with respect and careful attention, to their voices. The relationship between adult and youth needs to be reciprocal, for adults have wisdom and experience to share, and young people have valuable insights and ideas about how to face today's challenges. Young people are often surfing boldly through the waves, while many adults are still holding timidly to the side of the boat.

And is that Jesus, laughing alongside the youth?

## The Excluded

We marginalize people by pushing them to the margins of our minds, be they youth, people of different cultures, migrants and refugees, people with disability and so on. We dismiss them because we believe they have nothing to say to us, nothing to give us. They can only be objects of our mission and our charity, never subjects bringing mission to us. As a student who challenged her theology professor for telling the class to be mindful of those who have nothing said, “There is nobody who has nothing. Everyone is somebody and has something to offer, something to give to the world.”

How do we respond to marginalized groups when they offer to share material, intellectual or spiritual gifts with us? Do we look down on their reasoning and scorn their spiritual insights? Or do we humbly and joyfully accept the meal with the tax collector, the sharpening of wits with the Samaritan woman and the blessing of oil from the unnamed woman?

## Walking toward Jesus on the Water

Can we see Jesus, who sometimes comes to us dancing on the waves? Can we go further and leave the safety and comfort of the boat to go to him, walking on the water? Those Judean fishers were not foolish to be afraid. They had seen people drown.

We are invited to take the risks to walk in the rough seas of ideas and thoughts of those from the margins. What would happen to our Christian mission if we listened to someone we have never listened to before, not to teach them the error of their ways, but to hear what they have to say and to receive the blessings they have to share?

What if we went even further and made this a normal practice in our local churches? Can we make room for those outside the boat in all our discussions and decision-making? Impractical? Maybe. Difficult? Decidedly. Expensive? Probably. Dangerous? Undoubtedly.

If we walk out into those waters, we might drown. And yet, we might hear from outside the boat, “It’s me, Jesus. Come.”

## Transforming Discipleship: Story from the Margins 1

### *Welcome to My World!*

A white Christian lady was in tears. “What can I do to make things right?” she asked. I felt empathy for this sincere Christian. She was overcome with grief about the tragic history of my North American Indigenous people who were so wounded by colonialism. Broken treaties, stolen children and lands, shame for being Indigenous, sexual violence against Indigenous women and children was too much to bear.

Western Christian guilt is easily triggered by the sad stories, and she felt helpless. She found the pain of our story difficult to bear for the few minutes she participated in that meeting. I thought to myself, “Welcome to my world.

My people have been bearing this pain for hundreds of years, ever since your people invaded my world.” I am a follower of Christ, though, and wanted to help her and knew these words would not help.

Her question was not mine to answer as an Indigenous person. She is responsible for answering this herself. Another Indigenous friend felt her despair and gave a very long answer, telling her many things that she could do. Her response was enough words, so my answer was short and poetic:

“Listen to our stories until you are reduced to a puddle of tears.  
Stay there until God resurrects you.  
When you are resurrected you will rise up and find  
You are standing hand-in-hand with Indigenous people as an ally.”

My answer stunned many and some still remember what I said many years ago.

(Adrian Jacobs, Canada)

### Questions for Reflection

- Whose stories are well known within your community?
- Whose stories are less well known?
- Whose stories do you think you know well?
- What is your story? Would it make someone cry?
- Which stories does God listen to?
- How do your answers to these questions challenge the community of faith to transforming discipleship?

## Reflection 2: 1 Corinthians 12:14-16, 19-20

Adrian Jacobs’ story is an illustration of how a person entered the margin, had a deep heart experience, and desired to reconcile with those in the margin. She was deeply moved by how people in the margin have been ignored and marginalized by people like her. His words to her were a reminder that Jesus Christ, the most marginalized, could give her real life, resurrected life, after experiencing death to her old life of not knowing.

We observe that the margin here has a new meaning in our journey together in the world of turmoil and injustices. We Christians are on a pilgrimage of justice and peace. This means that for an effective discipleship, everyone needs to have a margin experience of the heart. Here a person may shed tears of repentance and experience liberating joy at the same time. The new meaning, therefore, of the margin is a shift from the centre, caused by the Holy Spirit, to include in the pilgrimage the whole body of Christ and those in the margin.

St Paul teaches:

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. . . . If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body." (1 Cor. 12:14-16, 19-20)

## **Transforming Discipleship: Story from the Margins 2**

### ***Invisibility***

You don't see me.  
I am the invisible woman  
who cleans your toilets.

If you come early and  
I am still there  
You never mark my face,  
You have no curiosity about my story.  
Sometimes I look in the mirror  
And it's like I don't see myself either.  
I have to struggle to maintain  
My image.

I came to this city of cold and snow  
Because I was being erased in my own country.  
I could not feed my children  
Take care of my mother.  
I came here to earn enough  
To restore my sense of dignity.  
I have a little money now  
But I am still being rubbed out.  
And God has to remind me  
That in the mirror  
I see God.  
God hasn't disappeared.

Look at me  
my privileged  
sister/brother  
Look at me.  
You will see God looking back  
At you.  
(Rachele E. Vernon, Caribbean/UK)

## Questions for Reflection

- Which people are most visible in your community?
- Which people are invisible?
- Which people do you see?
- Who sees you? Whom does God see?
- How do your answers to these questions challenge the community of faith to transforming discipleship?

## Māori Origin Stories

Te Orokohanga o te Ao speaks of Māori creation narratives, depicting the phases of existence from *Te Pō* (Darkness) to *Te Kore* (Void) to *Te Ao Mārama* (World of Light).

*Te Pō* (Darkness) is symbolic of the gestation period of a foetus that forms within the darkness of the mother's womb. *Te Pō* is neither positive nor negative. It is development, contrary to Western biblical interpretations of darkness representing evil or negative forces. *Te Pō* is reflected in the stories of *Ranginui* (Sky Father) and *Papatūānuku* (Earth Mother) whose children inhabited the darkness between them.



Arthur Thatcher, 2012—*Rangi and Papa*

## Transforming Discipleship: Story from the Margins 3

### *Is God Alive?*

I was in the Christian teenagers' camp in Jayapura, Papua, in 1988. During one of our morning services, a letter from one of our Sunday school teachers was read to us, asking us:

- Do you believe God is alive?
- Is God living now?
- Why did God let all my family be killed when we faithfully worship him?

He wrote this letter because his family suffered the ultimate sacrifice after years of being racially stigmatized. They were seen as separatists for speaking the

truth loudly and for defending the rights of their people. As a racial minority, they have struggled with injustices at the hands of the dominant racial majority. As a racial minority, they have had their lands taken away; their daughters have been raped and their elders have been killed. This is the story of marginalized races in Papua struggling for their rights and for freedom.

(Jerry Imbiri, Papua)

### Questions for Reflection

- Can you answer the questions asked by the Sunday school teacher above?
- What can a follower of Christ do if one part of the body of Christ treats another badly because of their race?

### Reflection 3: Luke 4:18-19

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

People on the margin include the poor, prisoners, the blind and other people with a disability, the oppressed and the deeply in debt. Jesus said the Holy Spirit was upon him to proclaim good news to the marginalized. The poor are provided for by grace, prisoners are set free from their limitations, those who are blind and have a disability are not hindered from experiencing the fullness of life, the oppressed are set free from their oppressions, the deeply in debt have their debts forgiven and their lands returned to them.

This is grace. This is the gospel. This is the good news. This is the church’s message.

The evidence that we are doing what Jesus did and proclaiming what he proclaimed are the shouts of joy from the poor, the leaping celebrations of the prisoners, the happy testimonies of those who are blind and disabled, the freedoms enjoyed by the oppressed, the hope in the eyes of the deeply in debt and their dances on their returned lands.

Is this what the church has proclaimed? Is this what the church has been part of?

Grace proclaims it. Love lives it. Peace feeds it. Joy sings it. Justice demands it. So should we!

## Māori Origin Stories

*Te Kore* (Void) is the second phase of existence that gives space for creation to manifest and grow, in contrast to the common biblical references to void, meaning to lack understanding, wisdom and righteousness. For Māori, *Te Kore* gives space for movement, for the shaping and forming of creation, as occurs throughout pregnancy where the child creates space for itself in the womb. *Te Kore* can also reflect the moulding and fashioning of theological ideas as is depicted in this image of Māori Jesus: contextual, liberating and engaging.



Sofia Minson, 2014—Māori Jesus, Depiction of the Messiah.

## Transforming Discipleship: Story from the Margins 4

### *Called to Life beyond Our Imagining on the Margins*

Born into Christianity and into disability, I struggled to make sense of the connection between these two areas of life. While my Christian faith was shaped by social justice, it seemed to ignore disability. Many saw disability as a personal medical misadventure, not connected to social justice struggles. In the mid-1990s two things happened that led me to make connections between the gospel and disability in life-giving ways. I read Nancy Eiesland's book *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, and I attended a conference in Brisbane, Australia, on "Disability, Health, Spirituality and Religion".

When reading Nancy's book, I found the disabled God spoke to me in a very deep way, affirming my impairment as a vehicle through which God could work wonders. I met people who took the gospel and the reality of impairment seriously and were exploring the connections. I was home! They spoke of the struggle of being human in all the frustration, despair, darkness and resurrection in our everyday lives.

The church is often so scared of being real and dealing with the hard questions. It casts these realities out to the margins because it cannot deal with them. However, on the margins there is both deep despair and also much rejoicing in resurrection life beyond our imagining. And our God calls us there! Alleluia. Amen!

(Vicky Terrell, Aotearoa NZ)

## Questions for Reflection

- Which people are seen as blessings in your community?



- Which people are seen as burdens in your community?
- Which people are blessings to you?
- To which people are you a blessing?
- Which people does God see as a blessing?
- How do your answers to these questions challenge the community of faith to transforming discipleship?

## Māori Origin Stories

*Te Ao Mārama* (World of Light) signifies the creation of the natural world where darkness makes way for light and growth. For Māori, the world of light came into being as an evolution of existence, just as a mother gives birth to her child. The narrative also recognizes the suffering and pain experienced in the separation of *Ranginui* and *Papa* to reveal *Te Ao Mārama*. In the Christian context, this is reflected in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity. Jesus exists as the light of the world reflecting God's transforming love, unconditional and abiding.

## Transforming Discipleship: Story from the Margins 5

### *Language as Identity*

The Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand are known as Māori. The Māori term for Indigenous peoples is *tangata whenua*, meaning “people of the land”. British colonization and assimilation brought about dramatic changes for Māori society, including the threat of extinction of the Māori language (te reo Māori).

As a child of the 1970s I watched with amazement as my grandmother eloquently conversed in te reo with her friends or siblings when they visited. This was the only time she would speak the Māori language. Visits like this were rare because of our remote location, and it was equally rare to see her put aside English and comfortably converse in her native tongue. Nana (grandmother) was careful about when and where she would speak her native tongue.

Nana raised me and rarely spoke te reo Māori at home because as a child she was persecuted and ridiculed for her native language. She was punished at school and forced to speak English. This instilled a fear of punishment and shame for being Māori. Her sense of identity was suppressed, and Māori were perceived as inferior to *Pākehā* (Europeans). Decades later, she would not teach me the language for fear of me experiencing the same persecution, even though in my era the Māori language was encouraged.

The impact of this in my life was a distorted and disjointed sense of identity that perpetuated the notion that Māori were inferior to *Pākehā*. The ripple effect was that I simply followed the cultural flow of things in everyday life, which was dominated by the *Pākehā* culture. There were times when I intentionally chose the way of the *Pākehā* in order to survive and be accepted.

Today, in middle-age adulthood, I cannot speak my Indigenous language and I struggle to understand it. With a mixture of admiration and envy I observe generations after me freely and fluently engaging in te reo Māori conversation.

Though Nana never used her mother tongue very often, she clearly never forgot it from her childhood. Today, I encourage my 13-year-old son to foster the language as a young Indigenous person of Aotearoa New Zealand so that he will not experience my loss. Proverbs 22:6 stands the test of time: “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (NIV).

(Shane Harper, Aotearoa NZ)

## Questions for Reflection

- What is the language of your heart?
- Are there people who are excluded by language in your community?
- How is losing your languages and cultures a part of becoming a follower of Jesus? Or is it already?
- What would it mean for you to lose the language you speak as a way of becoming who you are supposed to be?
- How do your answers to these questions challenge the community of faith to transforming discipleship?

## Litany from the Margins

**All: Forgive us, God,**

When murders of disabled people are seen as mercy killing.

**All: Forgive us, God,**

When Indigenous people are murdered and we are told to look the other way.

**All: Forgive us, O God,**

When people are murdered because of their skin colour and we are told they deserve it.

**All: O God,**

When we recognize all people share our humanity.

**All: We are strengthened in God's grace**

When we recognize all people are of worth

**All: We are strengthened in God's grace.**

When we recognize all people need to be embraced in our community

**All: We are strengthened in God's grace.**

When we recognize all people need the right support to live well

**All: We are strengthened in God's grace. Amen.**

*This paper is the end result of theological thinking and visioning by the Mission from the Margins Working Group which met at Stony Point, New York, Nov. 2016; Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, May 2017; and Trinity Methodist Theological School, Auckland, Nov. 2017. Theologians from the Margins (Auckland Drafting Group): Shane Harper, Jerry Imbiri, Adrian Jacobs, Lorna Pawis, Mele'ana Puloka, Kathy Reeves, TeAroha Rountree, Vicky Terrell, Evie Vernon and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams.*

# Together for Life: The Mission in Latin America in the 21st Century

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*by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches<sup>1</sup>*

## The Struggle for Life, and Life in the Spirit

- Open-Ended Questions
- Some Leads
- Framework
- Motivation and Dynamics
- Commitment to Action

### 1. Open-Ended Questions

Answer and discuss the following questions as a group, family, community or individual. Explain your answers. Expand on your experience.

1. The struggle for life: How would you describe your struggles in life? What are they? Does your faith help you in these struggles? What gives you hope to move ahead with your life?
2. What struggles have you experienced around you in your community, church, city and country? What signs of death threaten life in the Spirit?
3. What do you understand by the term “community life”? Do you live alone or in a community? What is your understanding of community? What do you think the difference is between having a social life and living in a community?
4. Life in the Spirit: How have you nurtured the action of the Spirit to help it flow, flourish and grow? How have you hindered the action of the Spirit to help life flow, flourish and grow?
5. Signs of life: In what area or areas can you sense the movement of the Spirit for life? Can you picture the transformation of your life and your world? What resources does your community have to contribute to these transformations? How could you contribute?

6. Do you feel that your church is unaware of the struggle for life? Why? What could it do to become more involved?

## 2. Some Leads

- The mission of the Holy Spirit is to turn fear into hope (John 20).
- The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love and a renewed relationship.
- Acts 2:45 and following, the first Christian community in Jerusalem.
- The Spirit that hovers over the universe (Gen. 1) and over the people (Is. 31:5; Matt. 23:37).

*The mission in the Spirit* is to be attentive to, look at and draw near to what is present in reality. It is to appeal to solidarity. It is to be like blind Bartimaeus, whose faith healed him. All joy must be accompanied by peace, faithfulness and devotion in all areas of life. The good news is based on what we have felt, with a feeling of love and gratitude.

*The breath of the Spirit* means opening our arms to others without caring about their limits, being together as companions on the same journey. We cannot be alone. We need to overcome our differences, to live together according to our differences, with our eyes fixed on justice, peace, equity, solidarity and dignity. These are the foreshadowings of the kingdom of God. To understand what is happening in this changing and unjust world, we must feel moved by the presence of the Spirit of life and deliverance.

*The struggle for life* must involve being a witness on the mission field despite the challenges. This is because the struggle for life calls us to follow in the footsteps of the God of Jesus, overcoming the limits and reaching out to the margins. The struggle for life is an integral part of Christian spirituality.

*We are all* sons and daughters of God, thus brothers and sisters of Jesus. The gospel and the kingdom promote life and human dignity. We are called to transform, not to judge.

## 3. Framework

Here are some levels of struggle and life in the Spirit

Level of struggle	Life in the Spirit means being against
personal	convenience, pessimism, disappointment, disillusionment
ecclesiastic	tradition, egotistic leadership, meanness, budgets, the elite, the church as a space of power
community	landowners, labour exploitation, racism, prejudice
capitalist economic system	origin of oppression, death

## 4. Motivation and Dynamics

If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:25-26)

As sons and daughters of God, we are required to walk in the Spirit, to walk together, mindful that in everything we do there will be struggles. It is essential for us to be together in this struggle for life in the Spirit. Jesus called the church to take part in the mission of God, to be able to discern the signs of the times, to bring this mission back to our contexts and develop it in a creative fashion. The question is, how can the church be relevant?

1. Try to identify in your social environment the places and concrete situations of oppression, where the lives of the weakest are at risk.
2. Imagine how you can help improve the lives of the weakest, in the defence of life.

## 5. Commitment to Action

Prophets return from exile. Jesus returned from the desert. There is a need for us to return nurtured and to go forth with prophetic voices in the midst of a polarized, violent and chaotic society, where the signs of death are increasingly visible with every passing day. Together, in the words of Ephesians 6:18, “Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.”

Being together is not the same as doing together. Being together is a treasure, sharing the gospel with others as Jesus did. Together in the midst of diversity, where what prevails is love, let us bear witness to Jesus Christ, continuing to offer a choice for the most vulnerable, fighting for the rights of others at all times, regardless of the circumstances.

Let us walk together with our own lives as this prophetic voice and take part in the mission of God. Let us live this fight, guided by the Spirit of God, which is life.

Think:

1. How can I personally get involved in the struggle for life?
2. How can we as a community get involved in the struggle for life?
3. How can we as a church get involved in the struggle for life? Remember that as the body of Christ, we must be present in society. Be relevant. Be visible, as a body is visible.

Write down a commitment on paper. Read it out in public. Name someone who can make sure you keep your commitment, who can set deadlines of action, like a timetable.

## **Mission on the Margins: Power and Powerlessness**

- Open-Ended Questions
- Some Leads
- Communal Reading of the Bible
- Read Together and Reflect
- A Few Lines for Reflection

### **1. Open-Ended Questions**

Let us think and rethink about God from different perspectives. Answer and discuss the following questions as a group, family, community or individual. Explain your answers to others. Expand on your experience.

1. What do you understand by “margin”? How do you understand the periphery of the geographical area? Are there many margins? Which ones can you identify?
2. Do you feel that there is a centre, periphery or margin inside the church? Could the centre be positive or negative? What kind of structure should our church adopt today? What do you think in this connection?
3. If there are margins, do you feel the church should adapt to reach them? Support them? Work from them? Or perhaps the church shouldn't change? If so, why not?
4. Do you feel that Indigenous peoples, women, rural farmers, African-Americans, retirees, the sick, the LGBTQ community, the poor, the elderly, refugees and the destitute are on the margins today? Why?
5. What structures do you think we have to bring the gospel to the margins? What challenges do we face as a church in this mission to the margins?
6. How can you get more men and women from your church involved, to work from the margins?

## 2. Some Leads

*The centre and margin* (or periphery) can be understood not only as geographical notions but also as spaces of power (centre) and vulnerability (margin), of dominion (centre) and weakness (margin). Unfortunately, in the church itself there exist margins as well as spaces that establish themselves as the centre. Remember, margins are always due to unjust structures.

*The disciples* made Jesus the focus of their attention. Nevertheless, Jesus went out of the centre to the margins. There, he put children in the centre, as well as the woman he healed, the woman he freed from sin. In his ministry, the vulnerable moved to the centre. Nor should we forget that his incarnation was among the people on the margins. On the contrary, the temple was the centre of political, economic and religious power, working together with the Roman Empire.

We are invited to turn our gaze to the life of Jesus, to a life of “madness” for love. This means *working from the margins*, from the peripheries—social, ideological and sexual. This is a form of confronting marginalization from solidarity, from support, not from prejudice, because God chooses people outside the power structure.

*At present*, the church is torn between strengthening its doctrine and being relevant in society: between greater emphasis on doctrine and dogmas and less emphasis on social relevance; and between a greater search for social relevance and less emphasis on doctrine and dogma. Is it possible to reconcile the two, or will it have to choose between them?

## 3. Communal Reading of the Bible

God calls us to put ourselves in others’ shoes.

### **The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus, Mark 10:46-52 RSV**

And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; rise, he is calling you.” And throwing off his mantle he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Master, let me receive my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

Read this scripture first, then answer as a group:



1. What does the text tell us about Jesus' context? What was happening in his social and cultural world?
2. What margins or situations of marginalization does it mention?
3. What connections are there between the passage that you have just read and today's context (community, church, city, country)? What could today's margins and marginalized be?

#### 4. Read Together and Reflect

Comment: What do these words evoke? How do they affect you?

I need to listen to you  
to know your needs  
and grow together with you.

I am alone if you are.

I need to walk in your shoes  
to know your pain  
and your suffering.

I want to be like Jesus  
and ask you, like he did with Bartimaeus:  
What do you want me to do for you?

#### 5. A Few Lines for Reflection

Today, how can we define the good news in our changing context, from the margins?

<b>Evangelizing today means...</b>	<b>Evangelizing does not mean...</b>
teaching/learning to live together (the good news) without exception	selfishness
sharing food with the needy	proselytizing my religious faith
living with others and putting ourselves in their shoes	imposing my ideas
finding hope together with others	instilling fear
building peace in spaces of violence	indoctrinating
sharing	conquering, dominating, ordering
giving and receiving (mutuality)	forcing others to believe what I believe
an ongoing task of social transformation	buying faith

taking sides with vulnerable groups	exclusion
always feeling challenged by the gospel	prejudice
dialoguing and walking with someone different from me	a one-way street

1. Draw a map of your city showing the margins that you identify. These may be the margins of poverty, crime, murder and violence, hunger, gender, status, etc.
2. Is your church working and evangelizing up to these margins? How is the message affected by what it is doing or has stopped doing?

## **Culture and Contexts: The Mission in the Spirit (Call to Discipleship)**

1. Open-Ended Questions
2. Some Leads
3. Motivation and Dynamics

### **1. Open-Ended Questions**

Answer and discuss the following questions as a group, family, community, individual. Explain your answers to others. Expand on your experience.

1. What do you understand by “mission”? What is the mission in the Spirit? From this perspective, who are the missionaries? What is their task?
2. Based on the previous answers, what does it mean to be a church sent to announce the good news, to share the joy of the gospel? What does it mean to announce hope in a despairing world where people are violent? What does discipleship mean?
3. How can we get involved in what others are thinking? Is it possible to be transformed so that we get involved with others out of solidarity?
4. At present, for example, how do migrants participate in God’s mission? How can the church participate with migrants? (We must consider both international and internal migration, migration between parts of the same country and rural–urban migration.)
5. How can we build coexistence between people with different identities if we cannot do this in the church? How can we do this beyond the church?

6. What can we do to ensure that the church is a school where we learn intercultural coexistence, without prejudice?
7. How can we distinguish between authority and power? How can we share power?

## 2. Some Leads

*The Canaanite woman evangelized Jesus (Matt. 15:22-28), making him reconsider his mission. This means that we need others to rethink our mission, being disciples and following in Jesus' footsteps. We are not disciples of a church; rather, we are disciples of Jesus and learn from his acts and words. Accordingly, we are called to be filled with mercy, respect and justice.*

*Discipleship today means understanding that there are diverse social contexts and diverse cultures. As Christians, we are one among many. Thus, discipleship means sharing these values, instilling in Jesus' other disciples a culture of respect, the search for justice and the building of peace.*

*Churches are painfully divided over some questions, such as sexual orientation. It is difficult to unite in our mission without a consensus on these issues. We must understand that today, these questions must be taken up with respect and without prejudice, in order to move ahead with what really matters: extending the kingdom that is justice and solidarity and searching for peace.*

## 3. Motivation and Dynamics

Look at the photo on the right. What does it make you think of? How does it make you feel? Share with the group, community, friends some pictures that lead you to think about discipleship in the Spirit. How can you help build a world that is more decent, just and humane?

*Provisional translation from Spanish, Language Service, World Council of Churches*



Chiapas, Mexico (photo: Pedro Zavala)

# The Pre-Africa Conference Report on Mission and Evangelism

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*11-15 September 2017, Nairobi, Kenya*

## 1. Introduction

The Pre-Africa Conference on World Mission and Evangelism is in the long tradition of the International Mission Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of holding mission conferences roughly every decade. The theme of the Pre-Africa Conference was "Dignity and Transforming Discipleship: Implications for African World Mission". In 2018, the World Mission and Evangelism Conference will take place 8-13 March 2018 in Arusha, Tanzania, on the theme "Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship".

The Pre-Africa Conference was organized to prepare the African inputs to the World Mission and Evangelism Conference. This pre-conference brought together 50 participants comprised of theologians, scholars, youth and women from All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and WCC member churches across the African continent. Papers were presented, and the report will be compiled into a booklet on the conference theme and distributed to the participants in Arusha as part of the conference information pack. The conference commenced with a powerful biblical reflection by the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Most Rev. Jackson Ole Sapit, and an intriguing keynote address by the Rev. Prof. Maake Masango.

The three-day conference was a time for deeper and critical reflections on the participants' roles as agents of transforming discipleship. The key issues deliberated focused on the burning and prevailing contextual issues, such as theological education in Africa, the future of the church in Africa, religious conflicts and ethnicity in Africa, governance, poverty, gender justice and dignity in Africa, youth bulge, and environment and climate change in Africa. A listening team was appointed to give a summary of the main points developed in the various papers and work on a communique, which would be presented during the global meeting in Arusha as the inputs of Africans in the world mission in its current landscape. The conference ended with a communique that was issued on the last day and circulated to all participants and stakeholders. The moderator of the WCC central committee, Dr Agnes Abuom, closed with some remarks.

## 2. The Objectives of the Pre-Africa Conference

The WCC director for world mission and evangelism, the Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum, stated that as the Arusha World Mission and Evangelism Conference will take place in Africa for the first time since the conference in 1958 in Achimota, Ghana, it is important that it should be planned and experienced as an African conference. Therefore, the Pre-Africa Conference is intended to prepare African inputs to and leadership for the conference. He explained the purpose and objectives of the conference meeting as follows:

- to prepare African inputs to the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism
- to offer space for Africans to formulate their perspectives on mission and evangelism
- to provide suggestions on the African evening during the world mission conference
- to work on a study document and prepare a communique on “Dignity and Transforming Discipleship: Implications for African World Mission”

## 3. Dignity and Transforming Discipleship: Implications for African World Mission

*by the Rev. Prof. Maake Masango,  
University of Pretoria, South Africa*

The presenter began by giving a general overview of the theme of the Pre-Africa Conference, which was “Dignity and Transforming Discipleship: Implications for African World Mission”. He noted the following: a paradigm shift from the northern countries to the southern countries; the shared and reinterpreted insight of the great commission of Matthew 28; interpretation of the continent from our history, creation story etc. Then he posed a question: Why are we “ordaining” politicians and allowing them in our pulpits to speak the language of God without believing and living by the holy scriptures? He noted that the church needs to be missionary, proclaiming the gospel to the oppressed, not fraternizing with those sucking the blood of the poor.

The role and mission of the church in Africa was challenged to look at the greed, corruption and ills facing society; address issues of gender-based violence; proclaim the good news to the poor; live with righteousness and justice and restore the justice of God among people as stated in Proverbs 14:34; and address issues of patriarchy and authority. The church needs to be prophetic and speak the truth to those in power, telling them that God is not happy about poor governance.

## **4. An African Perspective on Equipping the People of God for Ministry and Mission: Implications for Christian Education and Theological Education**

*by the Rev. Prof. Roderick Hewitt,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

The speaker started by highlighting that being African is not about pigmentation, but about being human and living in community—the “Ubuntu” concept (I am because we are). He expanded on the missionary model of leading the church characterized by paid clergy, clergy-centred, where evangelization was for numerical growth, not for the holistic development of the believer. As far as theological training was concerned, there was not enough attention paid to African theological material. The model of teaching was archaic; some ministers went through university training, which has a limited scope. The ministers are trained to operate within the walls of the church instead of addressing the world. Another characteristic was the teaching of liberal theology, which led to a liberal economy (capitalism) and a liberal way of leading (democracy). The result was that people were very educated but they could not even pray. They had status without purpose.

In the current church landscape, African Instituted (Independent) Churches (AICs) managed to find harmony between culture and theology. Pentecostal missions emerged, focusing more on the prosperity gospel. But the problem with Pentecostalism was that it was in the margins in Africa earlier on, with mainline churches in the centre; progressively, it left the margins to land in the centre without being fully prepared to deal with the current dynamics.

Another striking concern was that African Christianity was not comfortable being African. The missionary church had to face its identity crisis: were they like a potted plant, or did they have deep roots? The presenter suggested four things as a way forward out of the crisis: restoring divinity in humanity through life-affirming teachings; helping leaders to become a living gospel through discipleship; focusing more on works of justice in order to repair human dignity and facilitate social justice and responsibility; and equipping churches through Christian education or providing programmes in social transformation that is holistic.

The respondent underlined the following: Christian education is a process that lets people know who they are, a process that leads to transformation. He referred to well-known educator Paulo Freire, who taught that education liberates people from suffering and marginalization. Holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity and purpose through connection to the community, spiritual values and the natural world. Theological education needs to be open to the world. Persons with disability need to be recognized as being created by God and able to connect with all that God has created. Social

transformation needs to include people of disability in key roles, open to all aspects of life. Then they can play a full role in society. The new programme on disability at the University in the DRC Congo has attracted students from many different fields.

## **5. Gender Justice and Dignity: Transforming Discipleship in Africa**

***by the Rev. Dr Lydia Mwaniki, AACC, Nairobi, Kenya***

The paper addressed one of the key social challenges in Africa, namely gender injustice, which leads to disrespect and violation of human rights and dignity, especially the dignity of the female gender, both in the church and society. The presenter stated that this means that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church will engage in transforming discipleship or life-changing discipleship. This entails addressing the root causes of gender inequality, which undermine human dignity. In this way, the church will be fulfilling her call by Jesus to do integral mission, and hence will be relevant to the world and Africa. The paper covered the topic within the context of integral mission and defined important terms and addressed the question, Why gender justice and dignity in Africa? The church is called to undertake transforming discipleship in order to address the historical and structural gender inequalities that undermine the human dignity of females.

The respondent underlined several crucial issues. It is challenging for the church to use international instruments when they have not been ratified at the national level. How far has the church succeeded in creating a community that fosters the full participation of women and men? There is still a long way to go. Sexism and male domination still hold sway. There is injustice and violence against women. At the second African synod, little attention was given to issues pertaining to women. There is still androcentric theology that underlies attitudes that diminish the dignity of women. The church should be a liberating force, healing the brokenness of both women and men.

The church in Africa must introduce new models of church life. This can challenge sexist stereotypes into which women have been enculturated. So long as women operate in male structures of ministry, they will continue to experience marginalization. Can we discern new marks in the life of the church where women are challenging the church to be shaped by justice? What new insights from women's experiences and roles can contribute to building up a new community? Emerging voices of resistance all over the world are challenging forces of exclusion and violence.

There is a need to have a spirituality of resistance. Women's courage is a sign of hope. There are also men who stand with them. Women emphasize

relatedness, living in reciprocity with one another. They have a depth of analysis and see the interconnectedness of issues. All types of oppression are interconnected—gender justice needs to be considered in light of this. There is a need to identify other forms of oppression, such as poverty, religious exclusion and colonialism. In the context of HIV/AIDS, the face of the church has a distinctly feminine profile. Church can be seen as mother, and is visible in the many ways that women provide care. Women are greatly involved in the formation of children and offering care to the needy, which are key elements in discipleship.

## 6. Group Discussion Questions

Participants were divided into six break-away groups and given the following questions to answer and report back to the plenary.

### **Group 1: The Role of the Church in Reconciliation and Peace Building in Africa**

The group noted that reconciliation without justice is very problematic. There can be no peace when perpetrators of violence force people to reconcile with them: for instance, when politicians tell the church to preach reconciliation. The church is not coming to fully engage with the issues of peace building—“Come, let us reason together . . .” The church is wounded and cannot set out on reconciliation. This does not mean to wait on perfection, but there is a need to set things right. Confession is very important. They should confess first, then seek justice.

Power is another issue. Is the church qualified to engage political leaders on accountability when it is not accountable? Different threats to peace and justice require specific scriptures that the church can employ. The strategies differ according to places because they are not uniform: ethnicity, political, economic; all these are a threat to peace. There is not enough social analysis of our challenges to acquaint ourselves with what is going on. Do we understand the situations before we engage? There is a need to push for the church to have proper engagement with social realities before they move to engage reconciliation. Our churches should have research departments so that the church is aware of existing socio-economic and political realities in their different contexts. Discussions are very important to understand before they go for reconciliation. It brings about the relationship between the church and the academy.

The church has to engage critical practical questions, such as how we shape the curriculum to prepare ministers. The challenge is that of the separation of university education from theology. But there are ways and methods of dealing with that: i.e., to pull the church into engaging with the institutions of learning. The best model for this is the university in India.



## **Group 2: Refugees, Migration and Human Trafficking: Challenges for African World Mission**

The following issues and causes were identified: cross border and inter-border movement; human trafficking; stealing children; and migration for economic gain or for exploitation. The crisis can be rectified by cohesion; strengthening regional cooperation (e.g., EAC); visa rules; and creating awareness. Governments and churches should look at the conditions and situations that force people to migrate.

## **Group 3: Good Governance, Health and Education for African Citizenship and the Public Role of African Churches in the Context of the African Union's Agenda 2063**

The following concerns were raised: the prophetic role of the church; stewardship; mutual accountability; participatory role of everyone; and what sacrifice do we plan to make for those coming after us? We are all stewards today for tomorrow.

## **Group 4: Becoming a Church in Solidarity with Youth and Children**

Concerns raised were as follows: children need to be loved and accepted; there is a need for a children's policy in the church and good evangelism of Christ.

## **Group 5: Inclusive Community toward People Living with Disabilities — Role of the Church**

The following issues were raised: Barriers to inclusion for people with disabilities start with the definition of a person with a disability. It discriminates, so it is important to use the terms “challenge”, “differently challenged persons” or persons with disability. There is always a negative attitude, a cultural barrier and misunderstanding of what is healing. Therefore, these barriers can be addressed as follows: a church of all and for all and the gift of being: being called to be a church for all.

## **Group 6: The Crucial Role of the National Council of Churches (NCC) and Regional Ecumenical Organizations in Africa**

The role of the NCC should be intensifying dignity and transforming discipleship, creating programmes that promote Christian/theological education, having a prophetic voice — speaking the truth to those in power on issues affecting the society — and transforming leadership, and the church should live up to its role. Regional organizations and bodies must be involved and engaged. The focus should be on advocacy in trans-border issues, food security, training and promoting women, and welcoming internally displaced people, victims of migration and human trafficking.

## 7. Changing the Landscapes of African Christianity Today and the Future of Ecumenism

*by the Rev. Dr Kennedy Gondongwe,  
United Theological College, Harare, Zimbabwe*

The following scenarios were underlined as shaping the landscape of Christianity today:

- The coming of Christianity in Africa, missionary history.
- Ever-changing landscapes, with restless identities borrowed from the signature of nationalism portraying the complexity of Christianity, which is a constant flux.
- The many complexities and nuances in the colonial process. The colonizer assimilates elements from those they try to colonize; being African is not about a birth certificate, it is about understanding the African birthright.
- African churches today have a white past but a black future. Missionaries demonized blackness and presented Jesus as white. There was much collaboration between colonizers and missionaries (e.g., King Leopold of Belgium writing to the missionaries). Christian faith could be used to legitimize social inequality. Yet at the same time, missionaries provided the tools that could dismantle colonialism, such as education. Nonetheless, the role of African agency was minimized, even though they did the donkey work on the ground; the gospel was wrapped in European culture.
- Structures were discriminatory against women. Politics and religion were linked, particularly through the mainline churches. African innovations such as the AICs, and Pentecostals are in dialogue with mainline Christianity. AICs espouse an anti-Western Christianity. There are new charismatic movements, a fresh hybrid with a Pentecostal flavour, mainstream evangelicalism, and millennialism.
- Technology has been a key attribute. In Christian fundamentalism, competition is a hallmark, as are support for patriarchal structures and foretelling. Healing and deliverance are the core business. This is individualistic rather than communal. In terms of ecumenism, these changing landscapes are very ecumenical in nature. The new movements may not have membership of their own. They invite people to go to their mainline churches in the morning and to the new ministries in the afternoon. Every service is an ecumenical gathering. This is ecumenism at the grassroots. However, they are capitalistic and very individualistic.

The poor are always the victim. Another factor is materialistic churches springing up as compared to communal churches; capitalistic churches that exploit the poor. The future of ecumenism requires us to think of how we are going to reach out in these ever-changing scenarios and dynamism that calls for mainline churches to make bold and courageous choices.

The respondent gave a fascinating but radical response to the paper. He strongly emphasized the implications of the changes on ecumenism and ecumenical engagements, saying that the implications are at three levels: ideas, practices and institutions. These all require fresh thinking and practices that contribute to social cohesion and nation building.

He looked at how the changing landscape in Africa has impacted ecumenism and noted the following: Theories of telling the story are like the tools of building; you do not leave them at the building site. The history of Christian development is indeed complex—the responsibility of the African theologian is to simplify it without being simplistic.

The respondent pointed to the power relationship between missionaries and local Africans, the missionaries and colonials. The missionary-colonial relationship was to make Africans docile, but they also used education to empower Africans. AICs also built schools and owned farms.

The history of Christianity is complex, and changes need to be made at three levels; *ideas*—the emergence of AICs is a reaction to the missionary tradition which was a way of enculturation of Christianity by taking seriously the African cultures; *practices*—valued ideas; *institutions*—hereditary leadership. Personality cults and neo-Pentecostalism cannot be ignored. He referred to the ecumenism embraced in Europe, how they cooperate in finding common support in times of difficulties, for example, in funerals. Africa is in deep fragmentation, and ecumenism can play a new role to contribute to social cohesion through reconciliations, creating oneness etc. What is the African contribution to the whole ecumenical debate; what is going to drive ecumenism, new agendas? He gave an example of how Pope Francis has opened up to new denominations and held worship with Lutherans. Ecumenism is more than an agreement of ideas. What has changed in African Christianity and what does this mean for the future of ecumenism in terms of ideas, practices and institutions? The future of ecumenism in Africa in the past was driven by the issues facing the society, where denominations used to meet at funerals and other social functions, such as weddings.

## 8. Religious Conflicts and Ethnic Violence in Africa: A Theological Reflection

*by the Rev. Dr Lesmore Gibson Ezekiel,  
researcher, Nairobi, Kenya*

The presentation focused on issues such as religious phenomenon in Africa, ethnic phenomenon in Africa, what makes a conflict religious, what makes violence ethnic and theologizing conflict mitigation in Africa. The presenter echoed the theme of the upcoming world mission conference, stating that the authenticity of our being transformed disciples will be judged by our actions in the face of gross injustice, blatant abuse of power by those in authority, outright disregard of the existence of the others and the raping of Mother Nature. We must intentionally and deliberately get involved in efforts that make for tranquility and contribute to the well-being of humankind and nature.

Jesus Christ left us lessons of how he stood, stayed and journeyed with those on the margins, the discriminated, the abused, the excluded, the oppressed, the underrated, the culturally demonized, the diseased and those constantly vilified by the so-called religious others. He challenged those in authority for being insensitive to the needs of the people. As transformed disciples, we cannot turn away when things are not right. Our mission mindedness should stimulate us to unrest and unease in situations of violence and lack of peace and to prophetically confront such forces and agents of war and violent conflicts.

The respondent agreed that religion could be a vehicle to influence people in pursuing a joint just cause, but in Africa, religion has torn us apart and integrated us as a people. There are other elements of our society aside from religion that can bring us together. Our cultural values, leadership vision and the strong desire for a better society where every African is a stakeholder can unite us more rather than limiting social integration to religious purposes. There is a need to have a vision for service to the wider society. The aim is to promote peaceful coexistence.

It is important to be the voice of the voiceless and to take account of both unity and diversity. Ethnicity in Africa as a basis for identification often tends to promote political ideologies and create differences among individuals. This is a significant disadvantage and a possible precursor to ethnic violence in Africa. There is a need to ensure that religion is lacerative rather than oppressive. Moral formation is very important, even from childhood; to be formed in terms of how to behave in society.

Churches are finding ways to incorporate their culture. We need to say no to the demonization of African culture. Culture can be baptized. Our calling is to become active citizens here to bring about the will of God. The church needs to be prophetic and uncompromising when meeting justice. The devastating consequences of religious and ethnic violence in Africa—such as death,

broken families and the inability in many homes to make ends meet—lead to suffering, poverty, and increased levels of immorality that provide a pool of youth who willingly take up weapons to execute ethno-religious conflicts for remuneration. This raises the question of what religion ought to be, a blessing or a curse. This calls for a transforming discipleship that will bring God’s mind to bear in our communities and African nations.

Justice and peace should be our pursuits; seeking care and ensuring justice, peace and, at the same time, using the church’s power and authority to speak to unhealthy social structures, powers, principalities, religious and ethnic biases and political gimmicks that plunge the people into despondency and ultimately connote oppression and injustice in society. We need to exemplify the church’s commitment to the mission of Christ for the world. The biblical images of the church as light and salt of the world are very instructive for the church’s role in the contemporary religious and ethnic violence, the political and economic milieu of many countries of the world.

It is noteworthy at this point that the role of the church amid all these issues raises significant concern. In real terms, the government of the day has not received more than a verbal challenge from the church rather than intentional effort to implement a God-breathed agenda that will require the possible involvement of individuals from the church. There is a subtle expression of disinterest and lack of commitment by the church in political issues and, in cases where some members of the church get involved, the church does not have control over the politicians because they stay aloof from them. Perhaps the church is just interested in members’ offerings and tithes. It needs to place a quick, intentional demand on the Christian community’s service to the larger society because the “church is a servant of society” (M.P. Maggay, 2004).

The servant leadership model needs to be emphasized. Community organizing and social action also are required, playing the shalom and prophetic roles. The church should work at reconciling relationships among people and between people and God and their environments, promoting peaceful coexistence (Ps. 122:6). It should help the wholeness of the community and the individuals who live in and outside the community. At the core of civil society, the church has the responsibility of rebuilding her human community among people and God, the creator of the human community. This rebuilding is geared toward the common good of the community and seeing it, too, as a responsibility from God (Jer. 29:7; Book of Nehemiah; Book of Ezra). In this way, collaboration is achieved by working with people of good faith and good will. Prophetically, the church is simply to give voice to the voiceless, to preach the undiluted word of God.

We need to go back to having or putting in place avenues of social control that were typical of traditional African societies, such as affinity/relationship, deep storytelling and fixed systems concerned with the well-being of the community. We must promote uniqueness and unity in diversity.

It is important to have dialogue among youth in communities, grounding our young children in the Christian faith before they grow up and instilling in them confidence in the faith they have. This will help to counter fear, which could cause violence. We need to promote life-giving African cultural values, embracing them and embedding them into our worship lifestyle. Teaching cultural heritage promotes morals and ethics in the society. These backgrounds will enhance the Christian faith and worship of the supreme God, whom we know exists, have known and experience perpetually. Cultural values relating to moral behaviour begin with us. Our culture is positive and does not negate the scriptures.

## **9. Environment and Climate Justice as Key Challenge for African Global Mission**

*by Prof. Jesse Mugambi, University of Nairobi, Kenya*

The presenter opened by stating that culture distinguishes one society from another. Human beings have the capacity to either build or destroy their environment. Unfortunately, more often than not, instead of being stewards of what God has entrusted to them, human beings have chosen to destroy their environment. The negative consequences of this are many, including massive migrations. He attributed the degradation of the environment in Africa to a number of factors that include colonial and imperial expansion; dislocation of people from one area to another. He noted the impact of unfavourable land tenure policies; the turning of agricultural communities into squatters; the acquisition of fertile land by settlers at the expense of indigenous communities; the lack of motivation to rehabilitate land by displaced agricultural communities; and the abandonment of rural areas by the youth who flock to urban areas in search of greener pastures.

Dignity cannot be given to anybody; we cannot demand it, because it is with us. When God completed creation, he saw that everything was very good. God knows that we are good. Justice suggests a legal framework, a sense of entitlement. It is problematic in NGO discourse when the legal framework is not clear. The nations that are most responsible for climate change must now take responsibility to reverse the consequences. Global South nations are almost giving up. The earth provides enough for us to live on, but not if some of us plunder it.

Africa is the most adversely affected by global warming. The permanent ice on Mt Kilimanjaro and Mt Kenya has melted. In Africa, we will have to work hard to harvest rainwater when it comes. Dam building will be important in Africa. He gave the example of the Eldoret area in Kenya, stating that it is no longer as fertile as it used to be due to deforestation. In another area north

of Nairobi, a company invested in tree planting. Now it has more rain than the Eldoret area. He showed a video of how communities in Kenya have used water to change their lives through the construction of dams and using the water for farming.

The respondent emphasized that environmental issues are of great concern the world over. They are a matter of concern to the ecumenical movement and to world mission. They are of primary concern to the WCC, regional ecumenical councils and national councils of churches, as well as local churches. Churches, faith-based organizations and theological institutions have undertaken the responsibility not only of speaking on behalf of the church on matters of faith and the environment, but also trying to transform the church through introspection to reflect critically on environmental issues and articulate a theology that can help human societies to conserve natural resources. If the ecumenical movement is to succeed in this matter, there is a need to establish strong relationships with other organizations, faith-based groups and educational institutions regarding environmental issues. The dependence of human beings on nature is second to none, for without nature, human life is impossible on earth.

The environment occupies a special place in the life and work of the African people. It is engraved in their religious systems. In the absence of legal frameworks to protect the environment, like those found in modern societies, many African communities have belief systems and practices that prevent people from degrading nature by imposing ethical injunctions in the form of taboos which, if broken, have immediate consequences. As a result, the relationship between nature and human beings in most African societies is one characterized by being in communion with nature and not dominating nature. The aspect of being in communion with nature, based on African indigenous beliefs and practices, has ensured the preservation of landmarks such as forests and hills, as well as endangered animals, birds and other natural resources. Consequently, the vast natural resources of Africa have been preserved for millions of years until modern times, when we see a rapid destruction of natural resources through mining, deforestation, soil erosion and air and water pollution.

This is a consequence of capitalist economic systems that have evolved in Africa because of colonial expansion, systems that stand in sharp contrast with African moral and economic values that require a balanced way of using natural resources in order to preserve them for future generations. There is a need today to put a great deal of emphasis not only on the teachings of the church or modern theories regarding the preservation of the environment, as expounded in the paper, but also to call upon our people to go back to the basics of African spirituality as enshrined in its beliefs, practices and ethics. This is what AICs have done and continue to do. The Christian churches must move away from a theology of dominion to a theology of in-communion, from life-destroying

to life-affirming. This is akin to the theology of reconstruction. It is a theology of interdependence—human beings depend more on nature than vice versa.

African tradition has a balanced way of relating to natural resources. There is a need to return to the ethics and traditions of the African peoples, a need for theologians to turn to the wisdom of our ancestors and to protect Mother Earth. Profit-making ambitions have dictated the exploitation of resources. There is a need to take a different route—balance and harmony are needed. Religion as the pillar of culture has the capacity to sustain and empower communities. External solutions will not help; we will have to generate them by ourselves. We should also tithe the environment; put 10 percent of your compound under shade. There are many benefits to having trees in the environment.

## **10. Overcoming Poverty, Hunger and Injustice in Africa: The Role of the Church**

*by Prof. Kudzai Biri, University of Zimbabwe*

The presenter began with a Pentecostal slogan which says, “Poverty is not my name”, and then posed a question: Do such theologies reinforce the prevailing situation? This creates a chaotic situation. Politicization of religion and the religionization of politics is the order of the day in Africa. It is a very rich continent, yet poverty, hunger and injustice prevail. We cannot ignore the role of the church and politicians. Africa remains stagnant and violent.

Regarding church–state relations, do churches have a powerful voice to question the state? The only hope is from an alternative story that can embody new practices. Religious leaders benefit from the current political systems. There is manipulation by politicians. Yet the church is strategically positioned to offer a different narrative. John 10:10 says Jesus came to bring abundant life. Economic and political realities militate against indigenization and entrepreneurship. Traditional methods stopped excessive accumulation of wealth and provided for the needy. Now dominion theology is taking us away from that.

There are climate issues—persistent droughts and natural disasters. Countries with great resources end up being extremely poor. The church is also poor and lacks resources to address the issues. Christians are blamed for not praying enough, not fasting enough. The idea of a United States of Africa is a noble idea. Most churches are silent in the face of brutality and deprivation. If rulers do not align with the will of God, we should not obey. Where is Nathan? Where is Elijah? We need to be not just church members, but Christians of virtue. Is it valid to call for intercessory prayers for brutal leaders? Elders are repositories of wisdom; they must be respected. Gender justice is also important. Sexual minorities can become scapegoats for poverty. There are campaigns against single women. These issues divide the church.



## 11. Conclusion: A Call for Discipleship

The moderator of the WCC central committee, Dr Agnes Abuom, concluded the Pre-Africa Conference by acknowledging the importance of this meeting and stated that the theme of the Arusha conference is “Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship”. She expressed the magnitude at which women continue to experience violence and invited all delegates to observe a moment of silence in active solidarity and participation in the global Christian social campaign to combat violence against women. She spoke of “a world that is free of rape and all forms of gender-related violence”.

A call to transforming discipleship requires mentoring our young children and our families, nurturing the faith, and developing the foundations for our faith. As we prepare to move together in Spirit to Arusha from Achimota, there is dire need to ask ourselves where we missed the point. We are called to remember women and girls who are subject to violence in Africa and in many different contexts around the world. Wearing black on Thursdays is a way to be in solidarity with the movement against violence and rape. She posed some questions to the participants: Are we truly moving in the Spirit? Are we called to transforming discipleship? How are we mentoring our people? What is the nature and scope of leadership? How are we nurturing them, how are we preparing them?

The moderator stated that we need a leadership that does not look at itself. The young generation is looking at us as leaders in our society. The World Health Organization ranks Kenya as third in Africa for young people who are depressed and suicidal. As we reflect, analyze, pray and act on this issue of transforming discipleship, are we listening to the Spirit? What are those signs of hope we want to share with the global Christian community? How have others overcome them? What are the lessons for the global church? How do we capture Africa with its challenges, with its aspirations, with faith grounded in the word like a tree that gives fruit that recognizes the world?

Moving in the Spirit brings the notion of pilgrimage, of an ongoing journey of all believers led and guided by the Holy Spirit, she said. This pilgrimage is characterized by constant hope for a transformed world of justice and peace and a commitment to renewal in Christ. This theme offers a prophetic message amidst the complexities of today’s world.

# Called to Transforming Discipleship in North-Western Europe

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## *Some Reflections on Witnessing in Secular Contexts*

### 1. Introduction

The Arusha conference theme, “Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship”, reflects central notions of the 2013 mission affirmation “Together towards Life” (TTL), also found in this resource book.<sup>1</sup> The affirmation highlights, especially in paragraphs 24-35, that to be an empowered church on the move, the Christian community needs to discern the presence of the life-giving Spirit in this world; it is called to respond by journeying with Christ into critical locations of human struggle and into meeting points with others. This transformative journey of Christ’s disciples, in which the Spirit accompanies us, is both life-giving and costly. TTL challenges us to rethink the essence of witnessing of Christ, calls for repentance and offers a taste of life in its fullness.

In this paper we reflect on transforming discipleship in the secular contexts of Europe and describe some of the specific challenges these contexts pose for being missional communities and doing mission. On different occasions, voices and studies, including ones from churches in the global South, express concern about Christianity on this continent. For some, a spectre is haunting the churches of Europe—the spectre of secularization—that is most visible in the rapid decline of their membership numbers. The explanation offered is that this decline is the direct result of their extensive assimilation with destructive trends and poisoned values of secularism, such as liberalism, individualism, materialism, rationalism and relativism. The churches in Europe, they contend, look like the prodigal son, deliberately giving away their rich heritage, resulting in a profound lack of discipleship, weakness of mission and a fading grasp of the good news.

In this perspective, the secularized regions of North-Western Europe are viewed as seemingly abandoned by the Holy Spirit. Empty churches and the decline in numbers are a result of a lost evangelistic zeal. Therefore, Europeans deserve compassion, and they need empowering help from elsewhere. Recapturing secular Europe for Christianity, regaining spiritual and evangelistic power, they state, may only be possible with the support of vibrant centres of Christianity in the South or East. Initiatives motivated by such a diagnosis are

often labelled “reverse mission”. They can happen through missionary activities or the powerful presence of migrant churches in the countries of Europe.

One purpose of this paper is to open a debate on such differing perceptions of secularization, especially in North-Western Europe, making it a seemingly exceptional case. We will start by commenting on the notion of secularization in TTL and stating that its description is problematic in relation to current and future practices of mission and evangelism.

Here is one example: In May 2010, as one of the many Edinburgh 1910 commemorations, an important global mission consultation was organized in Tokyo, Japan. The theme was “Making Disciples of Every People in Our Generation”. Allen Yeh reports what happened:

Stefan Gustavsson of Sweden gave a Macedonian call (“Come over and help us”) ... about how to evangelize secular Europeans, the “prodigal son” of Christianity today. It was a good lecture—if a bit academic—but the organizer of the conference, Yong Cho, had a remarkable response. Tearfully, he called for the entire conference to spontaneously pray for Europe to regain its faith, and he invited all the European delegates to come up to the stage. In a remarkable turn, all the Two-Third World Christians cried out on behalf of their brothers and sisters in Europe—in particular two Koreans and two Africans (representing two of the strongest centres of Christianity) led the prayers. The Holy Spirit was moving; that was the most authentic and unforgettable part of the whole conference: I thought, if only the Edinburgh 1910 delegates could have seen this—what a difference a century makes! The Two-Third World Churches have come of age, while Europe has declined; who would have believed this a century ago?<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The European Contexts

It is hardly possible to speak about Europe as a single context for mission. Europe represents a rich variety of cultures, peoples, languages and histories.<sup>3</sup> We need to take into account that Europe has multiple contexts, both secular and multi-religious, and is increasingly intercultural as a result of migration. Moreover, there are considerable differences between the countries in North-Western, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, for instance, in state–church relationships.

Yet it is fair to say that all over Europe, to different degrees, a new situation has emerged that is often referred to in terms of secularization, post-Christendom and post-Christianity.<sup>4</sup> For centuries in Europe, there were close ties between those who were in secular positions of power and church leadership, laws were said to be based on Christian principles and virtually every member of society was assumed to be a church member. In European history,

“Christian” governments were responsible for bringing their subjects into the realm of the church and churches to legitimize the rule of these governments.

These views are no longer upheld. In the processes of secularization, over time church and state were separated. This brought about a change in the position of the church, ending its many privileges. In today’s secular society, people are free to choose to be religious or not, to be a Christian, Muslim etc. or agnostic. People go to church if they are motivated to do so. Being a citizen no longer implies membership in a church, and today, being a Christian no longer is an advantage in career planning or social standing. Religion has become an affair of church, synagogue, mosque and temple, of the private individual rather than of the state. Christianity is no longer an integrating force in society, but one of its segments.

Although most of its history is deeply marked by Christianity, Europe nowadays has largely left behind the concept of being a Christian continent. Large numbers of Christians still live there, but the sharp decline in church membership and participation in church activities is regarded as the most visible sign of change. This change is accelerating in the younger generation; hence, differing stages of secularization can be observed in the generations and also the social strata that form the present North-Western European societies.

This does not mean, however, that the role of Christianity in Europe, or of religion for that matter, has ended. Though many have chosen to no longer be a member of a church or to no longer actively participate in church activities, they still identify themselves as spiritual people who do hold some sort of faith. Next to this reality is another development, as both in the political arena and in public debate, the growing presence of Muslim minorities in Europe has led to renewed discussions about the role of religion in society and the significance of our Christian heritage. This increasingly leads to the realization that the European contexts are multi-faceted: they are both secular and multi-religious.

Specific to North-Western Europe, the secularization processes in formerly strongly Christian societies now increasingly cross and interact with a growing plurality of religious expressions. To be more precise, a growing number of religious communities, confronted by these same processes, have to define how they understand and live in a secular yet multi-religious society. The debates are not on religion versus secular society, but on the question of how various religious communities understand and engage with secular society and religious plurality. These understandings vary widely, including among Christians, and so the understanding of secular society has become one of the hot issues among religious communities.

## Questions for Dialogue

- Can similar processes be identified in your region, especially regarding urban contexts and among younger generations?
- How are these issues addressed in other regions, especially in multi-religious countries?

## 3. Our Understanding of Secular Culture

This paper is not the place to cover the ocean of publications on secularization and secularism in the last decades. These publications reveal a tremendous change in the discussion. The ecumenical mission movement also addressed this issue, which already was the case at the second world missionary conference in Jerusalem in 1928. These debates cannot be reviewed here, but they should be kept in mind when engaging with these topics.

### Secular in TTL

Now, looking at the way TTL refers to secular contexts, we find that it overlooks the complexities and intricacies of the secular contexts European Christians live in and witness to. Notably in TTL 91, the mission affirmation juxtaposes the term “secularism” with “ideologies that challenge the values of the kingdom of God”. A definition of the term is not provided, and it remains unclear how secularism is understood in relation to, or in distinction from, the terms “secularization” and “secular”.

When discussing the missionary calling to transforming discipleship in secular contexts, such as in Europe, the juxtaposition becomes problematic if secularism is not distinguished from secularization. TTL 91 creates the impression that being secular is the opposite of kingdom values, as much as individualism and materialism. This, however, may well be grounded in a one-sided understanding of what secular and secularization entail. Secular society cannot be understood as the opposite of faith, mission or kingdom values. It is more complicated than that.

### Secular Is Not the Opposite of Faith

We contend that secular society is not the result of failing mission or a failure to shape transforming discipleship. We observe that in diaspora theologies, in reverse mission in Europe and in some churches in the global South, secular society in North-Western Europe is often regarded as the result of failing discipleship and lacking missionary zeal. Proposed remedies, such as “Ground yourselves in biblical truths” or “Be stronger in your faith”, tend to overlook the fact that secular contexts cannot simply be re-Christianized and that secularization is, in part, also the fruit of the Christian tradition.

Secular society is the context in which mission and discipleship take place in North-Western Europe. If it is an ecumenical conviction that God's Spirit moves in the world and in its cultures, working toward its redemption and creating life, then the Spirit also works within secular Western societies. It then is the calling of the church in these contexts to discern how and where the Spirit works toward affirming life and provides divine space for making disciples. Transforming discipleship, then, should not be directed to oppose secular culture, but should, in witnessing and discerning, resonate with that context. Its invitation cannot be that people should de-secularize in order to become Christians. It seeks, instead, to identify the contours of salvation that have already been created by the Spirit, while also discerning the life-denying forces and idols that obstruct salvation and accepting the call to discipleship.

In our understanding, secular North-Western European societies have been shaped by the Christian tradition. Through various processes a legal distinction has been drawn between the role of churches in the private and public spheres (in relation to political institutions). That doesn't imply that the secular context is Christian, but at the same time, its emergence cannot be understood apart from Christianity and from its impact on history and culture. The plurality in both the former roles of churches in European societies and in socio-political developments has created a diversity of secular societies even in countries that may seem quite similar, such as the Netherlands, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. In these countries, churches are formed by people deeply influenced by secular values and ways of living. Their ways of searching for, living and expressing their faith are in themselves secularized, and so the dividing line cannot be simply drawn between church and society.

Furthermore, the understanding of what it means to be church is deeply shaped by contextual theological reflections of the churches in these countries about the best way to witness to Christ and to reach out to the people who make up these societies. Many churches understand the urgency of church renewal and a transformed understanding of discipleship in secular contexts and have developed many initiatives, but they experience that church decline cannot be countered by revivalism or ardent faith. Many people who live in secular contexts, in particular more and more among the younger generations, have lost the connection to faith and are un-churched or de-churched in the course of their lives.

### **Question for Dialogue**

- Where do you draw the separation line between secular and religious spheres in your region or context?

## 4. Blessings and Challenges of Secular Culture

There are no easy answers for those who are engaged in mission in such secular contexts. First of all, they have to realize that living in these contexts brings a mixed bag of blessings and challenges. We have observed that the focus in TTL 91 may be on secular contexts as permeated by ideologies that are in opposition to kingdom values, but the reality is more complex than that. As in any culture, there is both sweet and bitter, blessing and challenge (though challenges do not necessarily have to be bitter when they are understood eschatologically in terms of hope).

### a. Freedom of Religion

Among the blessings of secular society are, maybe first and foremost, the freedom of religion and the freedom to gather for religious meetings. In the so-called Christian era of Europe, individuals could not choose and/or change their religious affiliation. Persecution, expulsion or flight because of religious intolerance have triggered major waves of migration and of violence in European history. From that perspective, the separation between the religious and the secular realm, between ecclesiastical and political power, is also an expression of a long and painful learning process, both of church and society, as we have been reminded again lately in the Reformation jubilee in 2017. Today, religious freedom includes, beyond individuals' freedom, the freedom for church and mission to act in the public sphere. They may invite people to join in worship and to become disciples and may speak out against injustice in society. Faith continues to play a role in people's lives, even though membership of religious institutions is declining.

Freedom of religion in secular societies implies that there are multiple spaces for religious expression. There is space for adherents of all religions and convictions, including spiritual movements and even new religions. "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct", the 2011 ecumenical document found elsewhere in this resource book, relates freedom of religion to freedom for mission.<sup>5</sup> As Christians we are free to evangelize and to call to discipleship, as long as we keep in mind that the other always has the freedom to decide not to accept the invitation. People are free to choose and have the right not to be coerced or dominated by religious convictions. The document states that the freedom to do mission is a freedom for all, not only for Christians. In our secular contexts, Christian mission cannot have any legitimacy if it does not include upholding the right of people of other religions to invite as well to embrace their faith.

### Question for Dialogue

- How are these aspects assessed in contexts where Christians and churches are in a minority?

## **b. Being Secular and Having Faith**

We would also like to point to a number of challenges for mission in secular contexts. One of the first that comes to our minds is that many (secular, un-churched/de-churched) people who live in secular societies hold that being secular is the opposite of having faith or being religious. Thus, they share the misleading understanding of a secular society mentioned above. The conclusion they draw from that assumption is that faith is not about truth claims or shared values, but a personal opinion and thus belongs to the private sphere. When religion poses a threat to society, it is treated as an exception, such as terrorism using religion for legitimizing itself. Then the public in our societies is involved in discussions about how to cope with religious convictions that lead to extremism and violence. They then often call for more laws and restrictions on religion in the public sphere.

Although it is a widespread opinion that religious convictions are not relevant in the public sphere and debate, in none of the countries of those who wrote this paper has the conclusion been to ban religion from public institutions and public debates, unlike in France, for instance. The general debate is more about whether it still is meaningful to call a society Christian even if the majority is not practising the Christian faith anymore. In our North-Western European countries, we observe that the societies are to a certain extent permeated by Christian values, but these values are not necessarily labelled “Christian” by their secularized citizens. One example is the obligation, both for individuals and public institutions, to help groups that have been identified as being weak and marginalized. And the reverse is also true: A growing sense of populism leads to an attitude that wants to fight off refugees and migrants with the argument that they do not share the values of the Christian West.

## **c. Being Secular and the God-Question**

A second challenge is how the God-question has been affected. In the sixties and seventies of the last century—with its debates on socialism, communism and an aggressive type of secularism—the critical question to Christians was, how can you believe in God if science seems to prove that God does not exist? These debates are almost moot today because, as a result of secularization processes and postmodernity, it is felt that people may privately believe whatever they want. Nowadays, many Northern Europeans regard atheists who propagate the non-existence of God as being as outdated and old-fashioned as those who claim that God exists.

From this it follows that faith for many in North-Western Europe is irrelevant, not because it is about God and beliefs, but because it is not more than a personal opinion. When critical contemporaries question the churches and their members, it is instead about questions such as how modern people can affiliate themselves with a religious institution (a church) that is, justified or not, considered unacceptably rich and powerful; a church that is held



responsible for many evils in the past (such as aligning itself with colonialism, burning witches and opposing science) and which in modern times continues to be anti-modern in its morality and exclusive dogmatism. Religion, and especially religious mission, is seen by many as the cause and catalyst of social tension and conflict. In their opinion, institutional religion pressures, manipulates and radicalizes people and does not contribute to social cohesion, peace building and recognizing the unique contribution each person can make. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East, with its highly visible aspect of politicized and militant religion, has greatly impacted secular views on religions in the European context, including Christian religion.

#### **d. Being Secular and Christian Values**

Mainstream post-Christians have a tendency to portray institutional Christianity as old-fashioned and highly irrelevant. Usually they regard mission as one of the indicators that supports this view. This leads us to yet another challenge for church and mission in secular contexts. Many may have left Christian faith behind, but that does not mean that they are necessarily un-Christian in their ethical and moral views. Post-Christian citizens of North-Western Europe may still value Christian beliefs and practices. This creates new challenges for calling people to discipleship, as Christian faith (the good news of Christ Jesus) and the Christian church (the institution) need to be distinguished. One could argue that secularization processes are a dimension of the emancipation processes of gospel and church from the Christendom era in Europe. Today they form the context in which gospel and culture have to be discerned.

#### **Question for Dialogue**

- Remembering the ecumenical debates on gospel and culture, how is such discernment done in other countries, whether Christians are in a majority or minority?

#### **e. Religious Illiteracy**

A last challenge is a growing religious illiteracy in times that require an increased knowledge of the role and place of religion in secular contexts. Vis-à-vis the increasing religious plurality of European societies and the growing and sometimes conflictive role of religions on the world stage, the lack of knowledge of religions is not helpful in finding mechanisms to cope with current changes. In our North-Western European contexts, multi-religious and secular at the same time, the competency to understand and to relate to religion and religious expressions and being able to discern between extreme fundamentalist expressions and views that are conducive for a harmonious life in society must be further developed.

The relatively high degree of religious illiteracy not only applies to people who are indifferent to religion, but it affects many Christians as well. Shaping

fruitful mission in a secular context, therefore, also requires the education of Christians, not only on faith but on religions and religious practices as well. Christians need to become sensitive to the positive contributions religion(s) can make to secular contexts. In this regard, it is important for missionary work in the North-Western European contexts to keep in mind what is pointed out in the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World”, namely that Christians should make efforts to understand other religions from the point of view of their adherents and not give false witness about them. The Christian desire that the good news of Christ be heard requires our willingness to truthfully represent the views of others.

### Questions for Dialogue

- “The Christian desire that the good news of Christ be heard requires our willingness to truthfully represent the views of others.” This is an insight that the Christian witness document reinforced from a worldwide perspective for us in North-Western Europe. How is this point seen in your context? What does it mean for your mission to speak true witness about other religions and faiths?

## 5. Discipleship in Such Contexts

In what follows we intend to focus on the question of what transforming discipleship in these secular North-Western European contexts entails. In doing so, we are aware of the wider ecumenical debates about mission and evangelism in the past decades. There have been numerous approaches to discipleship, sometimes seemingly irreconcilable in their perspectives on the relationship of the kingdom, church, world and individual. Some in their theological reflections have upheld the hermeneutical necessity of taking a starting point in the church and developing the understanding of the world from the ecclesial perspective, while others have proposed the reverse, maintaining the importance of listening to the world first and then deciding what following Christ entails.

Some have highlighted the great commission (Matt. 28:19-20), understood as a mission to invite people to discipleship by making a personal choice to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and thereby joining the Christian family and sharing in new life. Others have emphasized Luke 4:17-21 and Jesus’ message of good news to the oppressed. Discipleship is then primarily understood in terms of testifying to the transformative power of God’s Spirit embodied in the renewal of human life and creation as a whole. Still others perceive discipleship as being led, transformed and empowered by the healing activity of God’s miracle-working Spirit. Others understand discipleship as being a follower of Jesus in a multi-religious and multicultural world, while discerning with whom they can partner in a pilgrimage for justice and peace.

Remarkably, after some decades in which the call to discipleship hardly surfaced in ecumenical debate, it now moves to the centre stage of missional discussions. Not only is discipleship the theme of the mission conference in Arusha, but Pope Francis also emphasized the importance of missionary discipleship, writing that “in all the baptized ... the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization”<sup>6</sup>, while The Cape Town Commitment of the Lausanne Movement made a plea for intensive efforts that should be given to whole life discipleship of all Christians, which is said to mean “to live, think, work and speak from a biblical worldview and with missional effectiveness in every place or circumstance of daily life and work”<sup>7</sup>.

### **a. Diverse Perspectives as Aspects of the One Call**

In our reflections on transforming discipleship, it is important to keep in mind that these differing emphases in ecumenical debate and practice do not necessarily exclude each other. In the North-Western European contexts, for two reasons, we aim to value and understand the differing perspectives on discipleship as aspects of the call to discipleship, and all aspects are needed to understand discipleship in its fullness.

The first reason is a theological one: As observed by Benjamin Connor, its unifying core and affirmation is that Christian discipleship hinges on following Jesus.<sup>8</sup> The varying perspectives can all subscribe to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s description of the call to discipleship: “Follow me, run along behind me”.<sup>9</sup> The other reason is contextual in nature. It has to do with the secular, plural and multi-religious North-Western European contexts. People searching for orientation find a multitude of churches and denominations which emphasize different aspects of discipleship, including underlying evaluations of the multitude or plurality of religions and the secular context. When we discuss the meaning of discipleship in our contexts, of course, we should speak about the call to Christ. At the same time, however, another reflective step is required, as our very understanding of discipleship needs to be transformed. This transformation is necessary to assure that our discipleship corresponds with, and is relevant for, the particular secular North-Western European setting. Secondly, this step is necessary in order that discipleship continues to be a call for unity in witness without becoming a call for uniformity.

### **Questions for Dialogue**

- What position is given to discipleship in debates of your church?
- Do you feel the need to contextualize your call to discipleship as well?

### **b. The Spirit-Infused Shift in Perspective**

In such a setting, the perspective changes; discipleship is then transformed from going out to address the other into walking together. It is a process in which the disciples will readily share good news, while also being transformed

by the presence of the other. Such a transformation of discipleship is both about reflecting how best to reach out and invite others to walk the same path and it is a profound change of attitude. It concerns a transformation from sharing the truth that one believes to own, to being transformed by the Spirit through encounters with others during the common journey toward peace and dignity for all in a secular society.

Recent mission documents have emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit as the agent of mission in this world. This is particularly true for TTL. We understand the affirmation that we are moved by the Spirit as a theological answer to the question of how we, both as individuals and communities, perceive God's activity and witness to his presence in this world and in our personal lives. To call people to discipleship, as TTL submits, then, is to communicate the gospel intentionally.<sup>10</sup> First of all, this is perceived as a confident yet humble call for *metanoia*, or a change of mind, an invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship. Understood within the framework of the Spirit's activity in the world and of our participation as witnesses, this call is for all of us to hear and accept, including those who already identify themselves as witnesses of Christ. Discipleship is not primarily, or only, proclamation of believers to those who have not heard the gospel yet; it is directed to both believers and those who hold other convictions.

Furthermore, those in secular contexts we are engaging with have their own wisdom. This wisdom is often spiritual, somehow Christian or even post-Christian, and its proponents don't wait to be invited by the church but are actively involved in creating expressions of their beliefs and spaces to practise them. Reflections about this in the light of the Spirit's presence in secular cultures results in yet another challenge: to accept that our discipleship will be transformed through encountering others, as our discipleship is shaped in a dialogue with secular culture and with the people who live in secular contexts. Even though, as Christians, we know where we come from and what motivates us, the destiny of our journey is, in part, determined by others as well, as those who join the journey will dialogue with us based on their values, wisdom and passion.

### **c. The Prophetic Shift in Perspective**

The Catholic theologian Stephen Bevans proposed to shape Christian witness in such situations as a prophetic dialogue. This involves spelling out the promises and challenges of the gospel, discerning both the destructive activity of spirits and the healing work of the Spirit. It involves being in dialogue with those we encounter, inviting others to participate in that journey, as well as making the transformation of life the primary missional objective. This challenges all of us to be witnesses of abundant life, as it is embodied for us in Christ and in the values of the kingdom that will be brought into a dialogue with the values of others. A focus on abundant life may help to relate the message of God's mercy

and reconciliation to people who live in secular contexts and who yearn to find meaning and meaningful life. It may help to develop the notion that there is enough if we share, so that justice, liberation and mercy can flourish and make good and meaningful life accessible for everyone.

As disciples, we are called to witness to God and to the redeeming work of Christ, but whether or not people accept the invitation to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, or whether they feel that we are sharing values and attitudes that are conducive for the end we are proclaiming, that is left open and not up to us to answer. We hope that people will join us in following Jesus, but ultimately that is *Sache Gottes*, God's cause, as the mission is God's (*missio Dei*). The Spirit calls and moves the heart; it is not us. It is God who leads people to conversion through the work of the Spirit.

This is widely accepted in ecumenical debates. For us in North-Western European contexts it means that we are called to humbly point to Christ as the embodiment of life and salvation. Such humility is very relevant for mission in our contexts. In shaping and doing evangelism, we need to assume that the people we are witnessing to already have deeply rooted opinions and convictions about the Christian message. Many of them may feel that the gospel is irrelevant to them or, worse, that old-fashioned Christianity is detrimental to one's mental state and severely hampers human autonomy and individuality. Yet many still hold Christian convictions while opposing the church.

### Question for Dialogue

- Does such an interpretation of practising a prophetic dialogue resonate in your context?

### d. Discipleship as a Two-Fold Call

In light of the above, we understand discipleship in our secular North-Western European contexts as a two-fold call. First, as the call of the Spirit to followers of Jesus to move, to embark on a hopeful journey toward God's kingdom, and second, as the call to join others in their life-centred journey. In doing so, we celebrate and share the joy of Christ's gospel in an invitational and respectful manner.

Joining the journey, however, should not prescribe conversion as a prerequisite. Wide recognition has grown that *metanoia* is a process rather than a fixed moment in time. During the journey, faith in Christ may grow and mature, but those who have joined the journey are free to decline the invitation to believe that the good news of Christ has ultimate significance or to decline the invitation to join a common journey altogether. People may embark on the common journey for various reasons. Maybe they do so because of shared values and a longing for justice and peace. Or we may share a spiritual longing for fulfilment and purpose. Be that as it may, it is our calling as disciples of Christ to humbly share what the life, death and resurrection of Christ mean in

our individual lives and our faith communities, and what they may contribute to a common journey toward life and peace.

This attitude is also reflected in “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World”, which relates witnessing for Christ to an invitation to fight with others—of other faiths or of no faith—for life in abundance for all. This underscores the interrelatedness and mutual dependence of proclamation and discernment as a dual dimension of discipleship in such contexts.

### **Questions for Dialogue**

- Have you engaged with this document? If so, have you read it in this perspective of such a two-fold call?

Certainly the call to discipleship as such has not lost significance and relevance in secular contexts, even though many de-churched people in our societies may feel differently. Yet though it is as relevant as it was in New Testament times, the shape of discipleship in our North-Western European contexts requires transformation, as journeying with Christ takes place in a rapidly changing cultural context.

As many European societies have moved into a post-Christian, secular, yet multi-religious and intercultural era, the call to discipleship needs to be not only affirmed, but also re-contextualized. Failing to do so overlooks the fact that, for many, Christianity and the Christian message have become incredible, unattractive and irrelevant. Both the Fresh Expressions of Church movement (with its emphasis on shaping new missional faith communities) and church initiatives that seek new ways to live in solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers in European societies (including efforts to defend their legal and human rights) are authentic expressions of a transformed and contextual understanding of discipleship in North-Western European churches. These understandings include appreciation of the manifold expressions of Christian faith in our societies both within and beyond our churches. They also have a keen eye for spaces people have discovered and created for themselves in order to live and express what they believe in or what centres their lives.

### **Question for Dialogue**

- Could you identify in your contexts expressions of life-centredness outside the churches with which you are willing to engage?

### **e. Discipleship as Evangelism**

In our efforts to respond to the process of secularization and dwindling church membership, churches in the European contexts have recently placed a renewed and remarkable emphasis on evangelism. This is also reflected in TTL, especially in paragraph 72, which speaks about new missional initiatives in the

secular global North, such as Fresh Expressions of Church, New Monasticism and Emerging Church.

In their renewed emphasis on evangelism, churches in the secular North-Western European contexts discovered that calling people to discipleship requires rereading the gospel and the secular context. It doesn't suffice to speak about salvation and liberation if churches fail to make clear what fullness of life may look like in prosperous secular contexts and what it is that we need to be saved from.

In our efforts to gain a transformed, contextual understanding of discipleship, we need to remind ourselves that prosperity is not everybody's experience in North-Western European societies. Many Europeans are on a quest for meaningful life, professional and personal fulfilment or meaningful relationships. In secular societies, the values of individuality and autonomy find their downside in individualism and loneliness. Homeless or long-term unemployed people, single mothers on social security or migrants without residence permits are just a few examples of people who have little access to the benefits of prosperous Western societies.

We need to keep in mind as well that for large segments in our North-Western European societies it won't do to invite people to join the common journey, as they are already (to varying degrees) engaged in what Christians are calling for. People in secular contexts will often feel that Christians have only seldom been ready to align themselves with those who were fighting injustice and that secularized, post-Christian Europeans have done so for a long time already. It therefore is not enough if North-Western European churches speak of salvation and the call to discipleship without realizing which aspects of secularity can be regarded as life-affirming and which are to be regarded as life-denying.

## Questions for Dialogue

- Could you identify such secular trends in your context? If so, would you be able to characterize some of them as life-affirming or life-denying?

We have stated that secular is not the opposite of faith or being religious; rather, it should be regarded as a characteristic of the context in which both Christians and others live. This has implications for the way we publicly engage in mission. For one thing, contextual mission in secular contexts requires that we constantly relate Christian beliefs (gospel values) to secular values and that we bring this into a dialogue in the public sphere. It is, then, also about finding life-affirming allies, partnering for the sake of the common good and embarking on a joint pilgrimage for justice and peace.

## **f. Discipleship as Advocacy**

We propose to understand advocacy work, which many churches and Christians of Europe engage in, as a form of discipleship adequate to secular contexts. Advocacy is understood here basically as engaging and advocating for the rights of others. Although one may, with good reasons, see human rights as Christian values, people own these rights while being citizens of secular societies. Christians in advocacy will fight for those for whom these rights are denied, independently from whether they may or may not become Christian. In doing so, they witness to people who may have a different faith or profess no faith, but who still should be won for the perspective and values promoted by advocacy and public theology—like fighting for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation and liberation—and for whom such values are valid, without the premise that they should become Christians first.

## **Questions for Dialogue**

- Are there similar understandings of churches' engagement in your context?
- How would you assess advocacy as a dimension of our mission?

## **g. Discipleship as Celebration**

That being said, the call to discipleship is all about a journey of faith that celebrates the incarnation of Christ, the gift of new life through his death and resurrection and the hope of the kingdom. While in the fifties and sixties of the last century discipleship was often understood in terms of leaving the isolation of the ecclesial enclave and improving the humane functioning of society,<sup>11</sup> we now increasingly tend to underline the relationship of discipleship and worship. This ecclesial turn in our reflections on discipleship recognizes that the turn to the world in solidarity cannot be separated from a turn to the worship of the triune God who created the world and will bring it to fulfilment.

Though we cannot limit discipleship to initiation and participation in church life, discipleship is intrinsically related to the community of Jesus' followers and to their faith practices. As is stated in the report of an ecumenical conversation that was part of the WCC 10th assembly, "Evangelism Today: New Ways for Authentic Discipleship"<sup>12</sup>, discipleship is rooted in Christ. It is in worship that we celebrate this rootedness in Christ. In sharing in the gift of the sacraments, the faith community is related to and in communion with God.<sup>13</sup> We agree with Benjamin Connor that liturgical formation is an essential part of discipleship, as it shapes and nurtures faith and faith practices.<sup>14</sup> As such, worship provides space for developing lenses that enable believers to live as disciples in the secular contexts of North-Western Europe, to announce the good news of Christ in a contextual way and to journey with others for the common good of the created world.



## Questions for Dialogue

- How do you and your churches see the relation between discipleship and worship, on the one hand, and discipleship as solidarity with the world, on the other?
- Concluding question: How can you imagine engaging with that journey of Christians and churches in Europe?

*This paper was drafted on the basis of discussions of the European Ecumenical Mission Councils (EEMC) at their annual meeting in January 2017 in London and during two study meetings of EEMC members and ecumenical guests in May and October 2017 in Hamburg, Germany. The authors—the Rev. Christoph Anders, the Rev. Dr Michael Biehl and the Rev. Dr Gerrit Noort—working for EMW (Germany) and the Netherlands Mission Council (The Netherlands), which are members of the EEMC, express their thanks for the lively discussions at these meetings.*

## Some Selected Case Studies

### The Netherlands: Celebrating Abundant Life Online

In October 2013 the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN) launched MyChurch, a missional website that is intentionally contextual.<sup>15</sup> The site is specifically designed for secular people and is all about “enjoying life, sharing beautiful moments, finding support in difficult moments, discovering and sharing important things in life, celebrating the abundance of life and making life more beautiful”. MyChurch is not just another informative website; it intends to create a community of people who share life stories.

The team responsible for creating the website understood that the internet was also a place for mission, next to tangible and visible places in de-churched cities and suburban areas. A creative plan was written, a content strategist was consulted and a professional team was put together consisting of two internet pastors and a web editor. Facebook and Twitter accounts were opened, and the website went online after intensive consultations with the content strategist. Figures for 2015, one and a half years after its launch, show that MyChurch attracts many visitors, and numbers are growing quickly. The site then already had 8750 unique visitors monthly, two or three new blogs were posted by some 25 bloggers daily, the Twitter account had 2000 followers and the closed Facebook group had 448 members. The initiative generated a lot of media coverage, even on national television.

### Germany: *Glaubenskurse*

In Germany since 1989 there has been a plethora of models for how to engage with secularized people: e.g., innovative models for being church, church planting or online and virtual prayer communities. There are invitations to be part of

the prayer life in monasteries for a short time, and many more which answer the wish of many for an intensive but limited time of engaging. Another approach is to offer *Glaubenskurse* (faith courses or seminars), which many congregations offer. There are different models mirroring the plurality of life in European contexts. All attempt to help individuals mature in Christian faith and become more conversant in matters of faith and belief. EMW produced one such *Glaubenskurse* with special reference to the dialogue with Muslims, emphasizing the growing importance of being able to reflect Christian faith in view of Muslim presence.<sup>16</sup> It makes a difference whether Christians approach Muslims with what they think Islam is all about or whether they are able to listen and to relate to Muslims coming from a wide variety of contexts and cultures.

In the context of the influx of so many people migrating or fleeing to Germany, especially in recent years, there is a growing need to be able to converse with them on matters of life and faith. One of the issues often addressed in these situations is what Christian mission and discipleship is about and how to balance the right to witness with the right of others not to be bothered by unwanted evangelism.

### **Denmark: Publications on Secularization**

The recent decade has witnessed two important publications on secularization in Denmark: *I hjertet af Danmark*<sup>17</sup> by Peter Gundelach et al., and *Society without God*<sup>18</sup>, by Phil Zuckerman. Both are quantitative and qualitative attempts to describe the effects of secularization on society and individuals. Zuckerman's thesis is that the effect of secularization is a liberating one, freeing individuals in modern society from religious speculation. The less religious, the freer and happier is society, he argues, and he points to Denmark as a case in point.

Gundelach et al. agree with Zuckerman when it comes to the apparent degree of secularization in Denmark in terms of the seeming lack of interest in religion. However, rather than viewing religion as having completely disappeared, they argue that Protestant Christianity has dissolved historically in Danish society. Individualization and consequently spiritual autonomy mean that Danes to a large extent maintain membership in the Lutheran majority church but are quite unwilling to accept the moral guidance of pastors and feel free to choose between more and less appealing aspects of Christian dogma.

### **Norway: The Baptism Project in the Diocese of Oslo**

The Church of Norway in general and the Oslo diocese in particular are experiencing a loss in numbers of members bringing their children to baptism. Only 60 percent of church members in the City of Oslo and 75 percent of members in Asker and Bærum municipalities bring their children to church for baptism. So the church formed a group. They collected background information, statistics and research on baptism trends and baptism practices, getting an overview of how baptisms are presented in the local churches' web pages,

how the baptism families are being met when they contact their local church or the regional office, how the baptism conversation with the pastor or local staff takes place and how the baptism liturgy and the baptism services are carried out. A marketing campaign was carried out on the trams, metros and buses in Oslo with pictures from baptisms and texts with a Christian message.

The aim of the project was to stop the decrease and to find strategies to increase baptism rates. The decreasing numbers have stopped, and it will be interesting to see if continuous work will result in increasing baptism numbers. The people involved did not refer to it as a way to have people involved in a missionary discipleship. However, the whole idea behind the project is baptism as a way into the church and a lifelong Christian life. The project raised awareness among pastors and staff in the church on the topic, and it reached out to the public through a marketing campaign promoting Christian baptism in a secular and diverse context.<sup>19</sup>

### **United Kingdom: The HourBank Café**

Bermondsey Central Hall and the South London Mission have been meeting people who are facing extra challenges because of the rollout of Universal Credit (a new way of providing benefit payments; all bundled into one single payment). The London Borough of Southwark was one of the first areas of the UK to see the introduction of full service. A built-in waiting period of 42 days meant there were thousands of families and individuals who made a claim in or after mid-November who would not receive any payments until after Christmas. However, people can end up having to wait much longer.

We have assisted people who have waited up to eight months for their claim to be resolved. Government statistics as of September 2017 show that for all new Universal Credit claimants, around 76 percent receive their first payment in full and on time, which means, of course, that 24 percent don't receive their payments at the end of the 42-day wait.

The negative impacts are now well documented and are being flagged in reports and discussed in Parliament. The written word, however, is not as powerful or as distressing as getting to know the real people and real stories behind the reports and statistics. For several months, we have hosted the HourBank Café alongside our Friday Foodbank. This is a friendly café environment with tea and cake—building community as well as providing a warm welcome for people accessing the foodbank. During December we also cooked and offered hot meals and take-away and tried to make more time to listen to people and work out how we can help them get their voices heard. Perhaps we can be like John the Baptist crying out—let's make a way in the wilderness, make the rough places smooth and the crooked paths straight. On Christmas Day we hosted a dinner and extended our invitation both to users of the foodbank and to mums and their children who are part of Mummies-Republic.

*(submitted by Bermondsey Central Hall and the South London Mission)*

# Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World

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## *Recommendations for Conduct*

### **Preamble**

Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings.

Aware of the tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and the varied interpretations of Christian witness, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and, at the invitation of the WCC, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), met during a period of five years to reflect and produce this document to serve as a set of recommendations for conduct on Christian witness around the world. This document does not intend to be a theological statement on mission but to address practical issues associated with Christian witness in a multi-religious world.

The purpose of this document is to encourage churches, church councils and mission agencies to reflect on their current practices and to use the recommendations in this document to prepare, where appropriate, their own guidelines for their witness and mission among those of different religions and among those who do not profess any particular religion. It is hoped that Christians across the world will study this document in the light of their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both by word and deed.

### **A Basis for Christian Witness**

1. For Christians it is a privilege and joy to give an accounting for the hope that is within them and to do so with gentleness and respect (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15).
2. Jesus Christ is the supreme witness (cf. John 18:37). Christian witness is always a sharing in his witness, which takes the form of proclamation of the kingdom, service to neighbour and the total gift of self even if that act of giving leads to the cross. Just as the Father sent the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, so believers are sent in mission to witness in word and action to the love of the triune God.

3. The example and teaching of Jesus Christ and of the early church must be the guides for Christian mission. For two millennia Christians have sought to follow Christ's way by sharing the good news of God's kingdom (cf. Luke 4:16-20).
4. Christian witness in a pluralistic world includes engaging in dialogue with people of different religions and cultures (cf. Acts 17:22-28).
5. In some contexts, living and proclaiming the gospel is difficult, hindered or even prohibited, yet Christians are commissioned by Christ to continue faithfully in solidarity with one another in their witness to him (cf. Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).
6. If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the gospel and may cause suffering to others. Such departures call for repentance and remind us of our need for God's continuing grace (cf. Rom. 3:23).
7. Christians affirm that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47). They recognize that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills in ways over which no human being has control (cf. John 3:8).

## Principles

Christians are called to adhere to the following principles as they seek to fulfil Christ's commission in an appropriate manner, particularly within interreligious contexts.

1. **Acting in God's love.** Christians believe that God is the source of all love and, accordingly, in their witness they are called to live lives of love and to love their neighbour as themselves (cf. Matt. 22:34-40; John 14:15).
2. **Imitating Jesus Christ.** In all aspects of life, and especially in their witness, Christians are called to follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, sharing his love, giving glory and honour to God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 20:21-23).
3. **Christian virtues.** Christians are called to conduct themselves with integrity, charity, compassion and humility, and to overcome all arrogance, condescension and disparagement (cf. Gal. 5:22).
4. **Acts of service and justice.** Christians are called to act justly and to love tenderly (cf. Micah 6:8). They are further called to serve others and in so doing to recognize Christ in the least of their sisters and brothers (cf. Matt. 25:45). Acts of service, such as providing education, health

care, relief services, and acts of justice and advocacy are an integral part of witnessing to the gospel. The exploitation of situations of poverty and need has no place in Christian outreach. Christians should denounce and refrain from offering all forms of allurements, including financial incentives and rewards, in their acts of service.

5. **Discernment in ministries of healing.** As an integral part of their witness to the gospel, Christians exercise ministries of healing. They are called to exercise discernment as they carry out these ministries, fully respecting human dignity and ensuring that the vulnerability of people and their need for healing are not exploited.
6. **Rejection of violence.** Christians are called to reject all forms of violence, even psychological or social, including the abuse of power in their witness. They also reject violence, unjust discrimination or repression by any religious or secular authority, including the violation or destruction of places of worship, sacred symbols or texts.
7. **Freedom of religion and belief.** Religious freedom, including the right to publicly profess, practice, propagate and change one's religion, flows from the very dignity of the human person which is grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26). Thus, all human beings have equal rights and responsibilities. Where any religion is instrumentalized for political ends, or where religious persecution occurs, Christians are called to engage in a prophetic witness denouncing such actions.
8. **Mutual respect and solidarity.** Christians are called to commit themselves to work with all people in mutual respect, promoting together justice, peace and the common good. Interreligious cooperation is an essential dimension of such commitment.
9. **Respect for all people.** Christians recognize that the gospel both challenges and enriches cultures. Even when the gospel challenges certain aspects of cultures, Christians are called to respect all people. Christians are also called to discern elements in their own cultures that are challenged by the gospel.
10. **Renouncing false witness.** Christians are to speak sincerely and respectfully; they are to listen in order to learn about and understand others' beliefs and practices, and are encouraged to acknowledge and appreciate what is true and good in them. Any comment or critical approach should be made in a spirit of mutual respect, making sure not to bear false witness concerning other religions.
11. **Ensuring personal discernment.** Christians are to acknowledge that changing one's religion is a decisive step that must be accompanied

by sufficient time for adequate reflection and preparation, through a process ensuring full personal freedom.

12. **Building interreligious relationships.** Christians should continue to build relationships of respect and trust with people of different religions so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.

## Recommendations

The third consultation organized by the World Council of Churches and the PCID of the Holy See in collaboration with World Evangelical Alliance with participation from the largest Christian families of faith (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal), having acted in a spirit of ecumenical cooperation to prepare this document for consideration by churches, national and regional confessional bodies and mission organizations, and especially those working in interreligious contexts, recommends that these bodies:

1. **study** the issues set out in this document and where appropriate formulate guidelines for conduct regarding Christian witness applicable to their particular contexts. Where possible this should be done ecumenically, and in consultation with representatives of other religions.
2. **build** relationships of respect and trust with people of all religions, in particular at institutional levels between churches and other religious communities, engaging in ongoing interreligious dialogue as part of their Christian commitment. In certain contexts, where years of tension and conflict have created deep suspicions and breaches of trust between and among communities, interreligious dialogue can provide new opportunities for resolving conflicts, restoring justice, healing of memories, reconciliation and peace-building.
3. **encourage** Christians to strengthen their own religious identity and faith while deepening their knowledge and understanding of different religions, and to do so also taking into account the perspectives of the adherents of those religions. Christians should avoid misrepresenting the beliefs and practices of people of different religions.
4. **cooperate** with other religious communities engaging in interreligious advocacy toward justice and the common good and, wherever possible, standing together in solidarity with people who are in situations of conflict.
5. **call** on their governments to ensure that freedom of religion is properly and comprehensively respected, recognizing that in many countries

religious institutions and persons are inhibited from exercising their mission.

6. *pray* for their neighbours and their well-being, recognizing that prayer is integral to who we are and what we do, as well as to Christ's mission.

## Appendix: Background to the Document

1. In today's world there is increasing collaboration among Christians and between Christians and followers of different religions. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) of the Holy See and the World Council of Churches' Programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Co-operation (WCC-IRDC) have a history of such collaboration. Examples of themes on which the PCID/WCC-IRDC have collaborated in the past are: Interreligious Marriage (1994-1997), Interreligious Prayer (1997-1998) and African Religiosity (2000-2004). This document is a result of their work together.
2. There are increasing interreligious tensions in the world today, including violence and the loss of human life. Politics, economics and other factors play a role in these tensions. Christians too are sometimes involved in these conflicts, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, either as those who are persecuted or as those participating in violence. In response to this the PCID and WCC-IRDC decided to address the issues involved in a joint process toward producing shared recommendations for conduct on Christian witness. The WCC-IRDC invited the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) to participate in this process, and they have gladly done so.
3. Initially two consultations were held: the first, in Lariano, Italy, in May 2006, was entitled "Assessing the Reality", where representatives of different religions shared their views and experiences on the question of conversion. A statement from the consultation reads in part: "We affirm that, while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating others' rights and religious sensibilities. Freedom of religion enjoins upon all of us the equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming superiority of our faith."
4. The second, an inter-Christian consultation, was held in Toulouse, France, in August 2007, to reflect on these same issues. Questions on Family and Community, Respect for Others, Economy, Marketing and Competition, and Violence and Politics were thoroughly discussed. The pastoral and missionary issues around these topics became the



background for theological reflection and for the principles developed in this document. Each issue is important in its own right and deserves more attention than can be given in these recommendations.

5. The participants of the third (inter-Christian) consultation met in Bangkok, Thailand, 25-28 January 2011 and finalized this document. Published June 2011.

*The document was jointly prepared by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the World Evangelical Alliance and the World Council of Churches. Published by the World Council of Churches, 2011.*

# Endnotes

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## Introduction

1. Jooseop Keum, ed. (2013) *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes; with a Practical Guide*. World Council of Churches Publications, Geneva.
2. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Evangelical Alliance, World Council of Churches. (2011) *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*. WCC Publications, Geneva.
3. See World Council of Churches. (November 2016) *International Review of Mission*, vol. 105, issue 2.

## Together towards Life

1. If not otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
2. Cf. Todd M. Johnson, Kenneth R. Ross eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
3. Cf. Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, Geneva, WCC, 1996. The term was originally coined by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos and widely publicized by Ion Bria.
4. *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE): A Background Document*, Geneva, WCC, 2005, p.13.
5. *The Accra Confession, Covenanting for Justice: in the Economy and the Earth*, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2004, §10.
6. Edinburgh 2010, *Common Call*, 2010, § 4.
7. *Healing and Wholeness: The Churches' Role in Health*, Geneva, WCC, 1990, p.6.
8. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no.111, 1982, §19.
9. Thomas F. Best, Günther Gassmann eds., *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993*, Faith and Order Paper no.166, Geneva, WCC, 1994, p.254.
10. Cf. "The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World: Reflections of the Lausanne Theology Working Group," 2010.
11. *Mission and Evangelism in Unity*, CWME Study Document, 2000, §13.
12. Cf. *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, in Jacques Matthey ed., *You Are the Light of the World: Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches 1980-2005*, Geneva, WCC, 2005, pp.90-162.
13. "Report of WCC Consultation on Mission and Ecclesiology of the Migrant Churches, Utrecht, the Netherlands, 16-21 November 2010," *International Review of Mission*, 100.1., 2011, pp.104-107.
14. Christopher Duraisingh ed., *Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures*, Geneva, WCC, 1998, p.54.
15. *Glory to God and Peace on Earth: The Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation*, WCC, Kingston, Jamaica, 17-25 May 2011, p.2.

16. “*Diakonia* in the Twenty First Century: Theological Perspectives,” WCC Conference on Theology of *Diakonia* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2-6 June 2012, p.2.

17. *Minutes and Reports of the Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee*, WCC, Rolle, Switzerland, 1951, p.66.

18. The Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment*, 2010, Part I, 7(b).

19. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, No.12, 2007, pp.489-504.

20. *Toward Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism*, WCC Central Committee, 1997.

21. It is important to note that not all churches understand evangelism as expressed in the above. The Roman Catholic Church refers to “evangelization” as the *missio ad gentes* [mission to the peoples] directed to those who do not know Christ. In a wider sense, it is used to describe ordinary pastoral work, while the phrase “new evangelization” designates pastoral outreach to those who no longer practise the Christian faith. Cf. *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*.

22. World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Evangelical Alliance, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, 2011.

23. *The San Antonio Report*, p.26; *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*, §34; *Called to One Hope*, p.38.

24. *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, 2011.

25. Cf. *Baar Statement: Theological Perspectives on Plurality*, WCC, 1990.

26. Vatican, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 1991, §9.

27. *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, 2011.

28. *Called to One Hope*, pp.21-22; 24.

### **Being Disciples Means Sharing Good News**

1. World Council of Churches. (2013) *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, article 6, referencing 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.

2. Lausanne Movement. (2010) “The Cape Town Commitment”, Part II, 3B and C.

3. *Op. cit.* *Together towards Life*, articles 79, 8.

4. Pope Francis. (2013) *Evangelii Gaudium*, article 120.

5. *Op. cit.* *Together towards Life*, article 31.

6. *Ibid.*, article 3.

### **Together on the Path**

1. World Council of Churches. (2013) *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, articles 1, 2, 12, 68.

2. Koyama, Kosuke. (1976) *No Handle on the Cross: An Asian Meditation on the Crucified Mind*. SCM Press, London, p.1-7.

3. *Op. cit.* “Together towards Life”, article 1.

4. Madge Karecki. (October 2014) "A Missiological Reflection on 'Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes'". *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 38, issue 4, p. 192.
5. *Op. cit.* *Together towards Life*, article 30.
6. *Ibid.*, article 23. (See also Pope Francis. (2015) *Laudato si'*, articles 11-13.)
7. *Ibid.*, article 22.
8. Henri J.M. Nouwen. (1994) *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, p. 23.
9. Pope Francis. (2013) *Evangelii Gaudium*, article 183.
10. *Op. cit.* *Together towards Life*, article 97.
11. Pope John Paul II. (1990) *Redemptoris missio*.
12. Lesslie Newbigin. (1989) *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 227.
13. *Op. cit.* *Together towards Life*, article 74.
14. *Ibid.*, article 73.
15. *Ibid.*, article 75.
16. *Ibid.*, article 76.
17. *Ibid.*, articles 75-78.
18. Ion Bria. (1996) *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*. World Council of Churches, Geneva.
19. *Op. cit.* *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes; with a Practical Guide*, article 79.
20. *Ibid.*, article 58.
21. Martin Luther King Jr. (1954) From a sermon preached at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. "Transformed Non-conformist", retrieved 2 March 2017 from [www.transformingcenter.org/2016/01/transformed-nonconformist](http://www.transformingcenter.org/2016/01/transformed-nonconformist).
22. *Op. cit.* *Together towards Life*, article 80.

### **Together for Life**

1. A pre-World Mission Conference consultation was held at Rosario, Argentina, 1-4 May 2017, and the group report was submitted by Rev. Dr Néstor O. Míguez.

### **Called to Transforming Discipleship in North-Western Europe**

1. Jooseop Keum, ed. (2013) *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes; with a Practical Guide*. World Council of Churches Publications, Geneva.

2. Alan Yeh. (2012). In: Todd M. Johnson et al., eds. *2010 Boston: The Changing Contours of World Mission and Christianity*. Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, p. 259. See also pp. 256-260.

3. This paragraph is based on Gerritt Noort et al., eds. (2017) *Sharing Good News: Handbook on Evangelism in Europe*. WCC Publications, Geneva, pp. 37-46.

4. See, for instance, Michael Bünker and Martin Friedrich, eds. (2007) "Evangelising: Protestant Perspectives for the Churches in Europe". Accepted and made its own by the General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe in Budapest in September 2006. CPCE, Vienna.

5. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Evangelical Alliance, World Council of Churches. (2011) "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct". WCC Publications, Geneva.
6. Pope Francis. (2013) *Evangelii Gaudium*, article 119.
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9. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. (1963) *The Cost of Discipleship*. Simon & Schuster, New York, p. 62.
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- 11 Johannes C. Hoekendijk. (1966) *The Church Inside Out*. Westminster Press, New York, p. 54.
12. World Council of Churches (2013) "Evangelism Today: New Ways for Authentic Discipleship". Geneva.
13. World Council of Churches. (April 2014) "Evangelism Today: New Ways for Authentic Discipleship". In: *International Review of Mission*, vol. 103, issue 1, p. 133.
14. *Op cit.* Benjamin Connor, pp. 257-258.
15. See [www.mijnkerk.nl](http://www.mijnkerk.nl).
16. Ein Glaubenskurs. (2010) *Christsein angesichts des Islam*. 2nd ed. Hamburg.
17. Peter Gundelach et al. (2008) *I hjertet af Danmark*. Institutioner og mentaliteter. Denmark.
18. Phil Zuckerman. (2010) *Society without God: What the Least Religious Countries Can Tell Us about Contentment*. NYU Press, New York.
19. See [kirken.no/nb-NO/bispedommer/Oslo/nyhetsarkiv/dapskampanje-velkommen-til-dap](http://kirken.no/nb-NO/bispedommer/Oslo/nyhetsarkiv/dapskampanje-velkommen-til-dap).