One human family
Greetings to the WCC fellowship and friends

A s we look back on 2019, we mark together many milestones on our Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, which since 2013 has been our way of describing the ecumenical movement. Through this approach, we have walked together as pilgrims, in our minds and in our moves. We have done so with keener awareness that we are one human family, motivated by our faith in the triune God and guided by the moral imperative of love to express exactly that.

We have prayed — and we continue to pray — to the God of life, God of grace, God of love, for signs of justice and peace, true signs of the presence of God’s reign among us.

During 2019, we focused especially in our pilgrimage on the region of Asia. Many Pilgrim Team visits to specific contexts in Asia confirmed that churches have a unique role in working for human rights for all, with justice and peace truly for all.

In 2019 we also focused on how we can address together the growing signs of racism in global perspective. Together with the moderator, Dr Agnes Ahoum, I participated in marking 400 years since the first arrival of slaves from Africa to North America. The civil rights movement there has inspired the ecumenical fight against racism, in that context and globally. Together with the moderator, Dr Agnes Ahoum, I participated in marking 400 years since the first arrival of slaves from Africa to North America. The civil rights movement there has inspired the ecumenical fight against racism, in that context and globally. Together with the moderator, Dr Agnes Ahoum, I participated in marking 400 years since the first arrival of slaves from Africa to North America. The civil rights movement there has inspired the ecumenical fight against racism, in that context and globally.

As we have moved into 2020, we have faced a new challenge as one humanity: a pandemic. We see how the fellowship of churches can serve all human beings in God’s image, inspires us and challenges us to a standard we must uphold in every context.

As WCC moderator Dr Agnes Abuom emphasized, “We trust in and are entrusted with God’s care for justice, peace, and our future — particularly the future of our children — and grandchildren — for all who come after us,” reflected WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit.

The WCC is bringing hope for reconciliation and unity in many ways, making the ecumenical movement increasingly relevant in an urgent, critical situation in the world, one in which the environment and future conditions for human life and all living organisms are at risk.

The world is also facing other threats, from growing racism and the increasing abuse of religion to legitimize conflict and violence. There is a rise in hate speech against religious groups, a rise in violence, a rise in terrorist attacks on sanctuaries, on people worshipping and praying. With a sense of mutual accountability to one another for how our traditions and holy texts bring wisdom and hope, the WCC fellowship will continue to move together to ease conflicts and fight oppression. May the pilgrimage continue until we all, as one human family, enjoy lives of reconciliation and peace.
The pilgrimage continues

During 2019, the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace turned to Asia, with prayers, visits and actions upholding the dignity and rights of all people. A series of pilgrim team visits to Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Myanmar and Thailand served to inform and spur reflection on the continuation of the pilgrimage.

Hosted by the Christian Conference of Asia, the WCC’s Reference Group for the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and its Theological Study Group met in Thailand in March to reflect on reports on the situation in Asia through the lens of the pilgrimage’s global thematic focus on racism and the whole issue of human dignity. Relationships were strengthened with member churches, national councils of churches, the Christian Conference of Asia and other actors in the region.

The WCC continued to express grave concern for people living under the scourge of racism, human rights violations, oppression and conflict.

For example, the WCC voiced concern over the deteriorating situation in West Papua, especially in light of reports from church partners in the territory that peaceful anti-racism demonstrations by Papuan students were attacked with lethal force by Indonesian military forces and armed settler militias. Another concerning situation...
was the listing of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, along with 17 other civil society organizations, as being fronts for the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army.

Concerns such as these — too numerous to fully list in these pages — were accompanied by highlights of hope in Asia. Hope showed itself, for example, in the 25 ecumenical theologians and leaders who gathered for public lectures coordinated by the WCC in Tokyo, Japan, in September, under the theme “Global Manifestations of Racism Today.” Their reflections focused on understanding racism around the world today and reaffirming the intersection of race and ethnicity with other determining characteristics.

In October, the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs organized in New York City meetings of faith leaders from Canada and the USA with United Nations independent human rights experts focusing on racial justice, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance.

Korean Peninsula

A WCC-convened Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification and Development Cooperation on the Korean Peninsula, held in July in Bangkok, issued a communiqué that reiterated calls for peace and outlined possible steps toward renewed dialogue.

The forum drew 46 participants from 11 countries, including delegations from the Korean Christian Federation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and from the National Council of Churches in the Republic of Korea.

Meeting in November with a delegation led by WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit and the WCC president for Asia, Dr Sang Chang, Korean prime minister Lee Nak-yeon expressed his appreciation for the work of the WCC and the ecumenical movement in promoting democratization, human rights, peace and reconciliation in Korea for more than 50 years.

In August, the WCC invited all people of good will to observe a Sunday of Prayer for the Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, a prayer that has continued to expand, drawing millions of people to augment the call for peace.

South Sudan

The WCC continued to express concern and solidarity for the people of South Sudan. In addition to praying and walking alongside church leaders in South Sudan, the WCC continued to facilitate workshops with the South Sudan Council of Churches to explore resources that churches use to aid in trauma healing.

Democratic People’s Republic of Congo

The WCC and its member churches around the world joined in praying for peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa. DRC minister of human rights Andre Lite Asebea visited the WCC headquarters in Geneva in September to discuss the human rights situation.
South Africa

As gender-based violence and attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa left communities wondering where to turn, a WCC Pilgrim Team visited the nation in December. “This coming together is a symbol of hope,” said Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches.

Latin America

The WCC expressed deep concern over the exceptional concurrent crises in Latin America. “Among other situations of concern, Brazil is facing a complex crisis of political and social polarization, affecting the rule of law, human rights and environmental protection, and diminishing civil society space, while Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Paraguay, Peru and Argentina have all experienced mass protests and political crises that have shaken their governments, economies and societies,” read a statement from the WCC executive committee. “In some cases, such as in Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Colombia, popular protests have resulted in violent clashes and deaths.”

Middle East

From webinars on racism, to solidarity with the Middle East Council of Churches, to ever-strengthening calls for peace, the WCC is making a difference and ensuring people’s voices are heard.

The WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, a response to a specific call from church leaders in the region, continues to witness with communities under occupation. In March, a group of ecumenical accompaniers from the WCC were invited to share Shabbat dinner with the Kol HaNeshama congregation in Jerusalem. During the same month, the WCC shared stories that celebrated the diversity of the area’s Christians during Easter celebrations in Jerusalem.

Rabbis for Human Rights organized a solidarity walk through the Israeli-administered H2 area of Hebron, where growing tensions forced the WCC to temporarily suspend its presence of ecumenical accompaniers.

The WCC also stood firm amid inaccuracies and false innuendo about its presence and work there. The WCC’s ecumenical accompaniers continued their work in the region, witnessing to the lived realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The WCC continues to affirm the right of the State of Israel to exist, within its internationally accepted borders, in full sovereignty and free from the threat of violence. The WCC equally affirms the right of Palestinian people to freedom from military occupation, to self-determination within their own state alongside Israel, and to live their lives in peace.
Addressing the climate emergency

The climate crisis is not a distant prospect, but is upon us today. “Children, young people and ordinary citizens have made public demonstration of their outrage at the lack of any adequate response by governments to the gravity of this global crisis, and against the backsliding by some governments,” read a statement from the WCC executive committee.

That message was reiterated by the WCC at the UN climate talks in December, in Madrid, Spain, during which the WCC asserted that, if the world is to address the climate emergency, every person must be involved in a transformation on many levels.

“We call for systemic, cultural and spiritual transformations that may be translated into changes in the ways we live, produce and consume,” read the message of the WCC on behalf of the faith-based organizations attending the talks.

Rev. James Bhagwan, general secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, also shared some of his frustrations and hopes in the face of the climate emergency. “There are a lot of challenges on the agenda from some of the wealthiest nations that are the biggest polluters,” he said. “From our perspective, we want to bring an ocean’s agenda into the climate change discussions, because then things will start to move.”

Guided by wisdom from indigenous people, the WCC global fellowship has found new inspiration and determination to carry climate justice work forward. In a special series on Greenland, WCC communications explored a stunningly beautiful landscape in which churches are helping people find hope, even as global warming threatens their way of life. A rise in temperatures in Greenland and other places in the Arctic had been anticipated by scientists, but it has happened much faster and more dramatically than expected.

After the Madrid conference, the WCC general secretary, in a letter to all member churches, reinforced the urgent character of the challenge, saying that “our futures, the well-being of our common home, and the very existence of our species are at risk…. In this context, I write to urge your creative action, your advocacy, and your prayer before prayer becomes our only recourse,” he wrote. “It is almost too late, but we can still make a difference if we act now!”

Young people at the forefront

During the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York City at the end of September, the goal was to advance climate action for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to prevent the mean global temperature from rising by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Climate marches and renewed dialogue across the world represented the biggest global mobilization for climate justice yet, clearly with young people at the forefront.

During the climate summit, churches worldwide — from Colombia to Canada, India to Scotland — reclaimed and strengthened their roles in sustaining the momentum to demand from world leaders deep-seated change — including economic transformation — to tackle the climate emergency.

In a joint statement, the WCC, joined ACT Alliance and the Lutheran World Federation as they all strengthened their collective call for climate justice and immediate action.

“As we focus on the interconnectedness of God’s creation, our churches are urging governments worldwide to take stronger measures and present concrete plans to address climate change – now,” the statement read.

In November, young people attended an Eco-School in Chiang Mai, Thailand, noting that large numbers of people in Asia don’t have access to safe drinking water. Jointly organized by the WCC and the Christian Conference of Asia, and supported by the World Student Christian Federation Asia Pacific region, the Eco-School closed with 27 young people vowing to nurture “blue communities” and green churches when they return home.

In August in Bogor, Indonesia, participants at the annual Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management (GEM) explored how an Economy of Life is a key pillar of the Pilgrimage of Justice and
Peace. “We hope the Governance, Economics and Management School will empower participants to act, lobby for change and even influence socio-economic policymaking,” said WCC deputy general secretary Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri.

Water and food justice now

In late August, the WCC Ecumenical Water Network participated, for the fourth consecutive year, in World Water Week, held in Stockholm, Sweden. Together with partners, the WCC co-hosted a showcase during which a number of sustainability issues were discussed.

Ecumenical Water Network coordinator Dinesh Suna said: “As in previous years, this year the WCC was one of the lead organizers of the Water and Faith event at World Water Week — a showcase of best practices by faith communities in addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to ensure water and sanitation for all.”

The WCC began its annual Lenten Campaign “Seven Weeks for Water” in March, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and provided weekly theological reflections and other resources on water for the seven weeks of Lent and for World Water Day on 22 March, which falls during the Lenten period. The event was held under the auspices of the Christian Conference of Asia and in the presence of the Reference Group of the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

Suna also spoke at the G20 Interfaith Forum, held in June in Tokyo. The 2019 theme was “Peace, People, Planet: Pathways Forward.” About 2,000 participants attend the gathering, which preceded the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan. The interfaith forum submitted recommendations for G20 leaders.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, speaking during the closing session of the Amsterdam International Water Week in November, said that “clean water is nothing less than a moral crisis and a moral challenge.” The Amsterdam International Water Week is a global movement committed to a future in which a circular and sustainable water environment is achieved.

“The language of science and the enterprise of innovation, the determination of environmentalists and the initiative of policymakers – all of this energy complements the purpose of theology to open our eyes to the divine mystery and wonder of creation,” he said.

In October, the WCC Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance invited churches around the world to a Churches’ Week of Action on Food, an opportunity to pray, reflect and take action together, for food justice across the globe.

It is a “campaign initiated by the WCC through which we invite the global ecumenical movement and organizations, community-based organizations and faith-based organizations to act collectively for food justice,” explained Manoj Kurian, coordinator of the WCC Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and its Food for Life Campaign.

As Green Village construction begins, WCC honours ecological concerns

The WCC was addressing ecological concerns, including climate change, “way before it was fashionable,” Tveit said at a presentation on the Green Village, the new development concept for the property on which the Ecumenical Centre now stands.

The Green Village will include a renovated Ecumenical Centre; new office space for commercial and civil society organizations, including the WCC, its sister organizations and tenants; and residential space.

Tveit explained that the WCC has addressed ecological concerns since the 1970s, and had been working on climate change as early as the 1980s.

The general secretary said that the WCC has engaged with and supported many of the environmental protocols, which bear the names of the cities where negotiations were held, such as Montreal and Kyoto. The Green Village buildings are named after the cities of those protocols.

“Not only through theological reflection and education, advocacy for ecologically just agreements and policies, but also in our daily operations as institutions, we must bear witness to our principles, particularly when there is the opportunity to plan for the future,” said Tveit.

“The WCC promotes living in accordance with the covenant with God and creation; supporting just and sustainable consumption, life-giving agriculture, and encouraging economies that promote life.”

And It Is Good

A photo exhibit entitled “And It Is Good” offered fresh inspiration to viewers who realized how caring for creation is not just important but an emergency measure.

During the exhibit opening in September, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit remarked that “this is another good moment for us to stand together and to also celebrate something together as we are...”
Climate change

Indigenous peoples are not only on the frontline of climate change impacts, they are also uniquely equipped with expertise to help defend ecology. Two groups — the Ecumenical Indigenous Peoples’ Networks Reference Group and the WCC Working Group on Climate Change — underscored this idea as they met in July to discuss the world’s climate emergency. Both are composed of theologians, indigenous persons, scientists and experts on ecology and economy, representing churches from around the world.

Justice and peace

The National Council of Churches in Australia held its 10th National Forum in late June, and more than 65 people gathered in Canberra to participate in a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace with First Nations people.

The “Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice” is an invitation to join a pilgrimage for an Economy of Life and climate justice, to commit to make changes in the way people live, to share successful ideas and to encourage one another.

The “Roadmap” offers a five-step programme to change the way we deal with the economy and our ecological surroundings in the following areas: living in accordance with the covenant with God and creation, renewable energy and climate protection, just and sustainable consumption, economies of life and networking.

“The way we interact with the economy and creation — not only as private persons, but also as congregations, communities and churches — is strongly connected with our faith convictions,” wrote Tendis in the foreword to the publication.

By bringing examples of how individuals and congregations can support and practice small-scale, life-giving agriculture, and create community gardens and access to clean water, the roadmap emphasizes the potentially transformative power that individuals and congregations have through their example.

The “Roadmap” invites a pilgrimage for eco-justice

A new WCC resource for churches’ practical engagement in ecological and economic justice became available in four languages during 2019. The “Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice” is an invitation to join a pilgrimage for an Economy of Life and climate justice, to commit to make changes in the way people live, to share successful ideas and to encourage one another.

The publication is the fruit of work led by Rev. Norman Tendis, WCC consultant for Economy of Life, who was one of the victims of the Ethiopian Airlines crash in March.

The unique contribution of indigenous peoples

Aboriginal people have been in Australia for at least 60,000 years and are one of the oldest surviving cultures in the world. Today, however, indigenous communities, both remote and urban, experience heightened levels of disadvantage.
Exceptional students, bright future

The WCC Ecumenical Institute at Château de Bossey, in its picturesque setting near Geneva, is an exceptional place that has grown even more unique in 2019. Bossey shapes the ecumenical formation, consciousness and awareness of the world in students, who are not just engaged in coursework but in global interaction that crosses geographic and faith lines.

The class of 2019-2020 — Bossey’s most diverse ever — expressed their sense of trust in each other in a message: “The reality of making the decision to come to Bossey was hard. Let’s be honest, this place is strange, we are deep in the woods in a separate far off place. Through dialogue, through classes, through meals and through helping us find trust in you and in each other — you have proven to us that Christian unity can be lived. Every day was practical ecumenical theology in the classroom, the living room, and in the chapel.”

Hotel rolls out the welcome mat

Described as “a place to rest” and “a place to meet,” the new Château de Bossey Hotel and Conference Centre offers 90 comfortable and quiet rooms to enjoy your stay in the heart of nature, as well as 10 fully equipped meeting rooms with daylight that are open to the park. All of this is located just 15 kilometres outside Geneva.

From the restaurant terrace, visitors enjoy a clear view of Lake Geneva and a broad range of freshly cooked food in a buffet-style manner, prepared with care and thoughtfulness. “Our meals are based on seasonal groceries we buy at the market,” said Remi Pheulpin, chef at the restaurant.

Words of wisdom

JÜRGEN MOLTMANN

In December, renowned theologian Jürgen Moltmann told students that, after his experiences in World War II, he turned his back on nationalism. Moltmann had a simple message: “The church of Christ is present in all the people on earth and cannot become ‘a national religion.’ The church of Christ ecumenically embraces the whole inhabited earth. She is not a tribal religion, nor a Western religion, nor a white religion, but the church of all humanity.” Moltmann’s visit to Bossey followed a book launch in Geneva and his lecture there on “The Spirit of Truth” in a “post-truth” world.

ESTHER MOMBO

Kenyan theologian Esther Mombo was born into an ecumenical environment in East Africa. She had a transcontinental education and told Bossey students that African Christianity is “young and vibrant,” but that it needs to listen to the “women in the pews.”

“My father was a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and my mother was a member of the Religious Society of Friends. I was brought up by a Quaker grandmother, my first pastor and theological educator,” she told students in October at Bossey’s annual Dies Academicus.
Honouring traditions while forging new paths

The WCC journal Current Dialogue, with its time-honoured focus on rethinking interfaith engagement, has a new format as the WCC’s third academic journal published by Wiley, alongside The Ecumenical Review and the International Review of Mission. Recognizing the indispensability of interreligious dialogue amid changing religious realities, the journal seeks to offer space for stimulating and sustained reflections on a wide range of interreligious issues.

“It is my hope that in the years to come, the new Current Dialogue will offer a theologically vibrant and contextually grounded platform for debate on issues at the heart of interreligious engagement from an ecumenical perspective,” wrote WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit in a foreword.

Current Dialogue will now be published annually by Wiley as a special issue of The Ecumenical Review.

One of the most long-standing and respected journals in the field of interreligious dialogue, Current Dialogue started publication in 1980–81, produced by the WCC’s then programme on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies.

WCC hosts historic Sikh-Christian dialogue

The WCC hosted a Sikh-Christian dialogue in July with the theme “Pursuing Peace in a Pluralistic World.” The event brought together about 40 religious leaders, scholars and independent activists from the Christian and Sikh traditions.

Tveit expressed joy at the first official WCC-hosted Christian-Sikh dialogue. “This is an important year in the Sikh calendar as it marks the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak,” he said. “Therefore, initiating this formal encounter between Christians and Sikhs during this year is a special way of commemorating the life and work of Guru Nanak.”

WCC, IJCIC agree to restore formal relations

The WCC and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) met formally in June in Paris under the theme “The Normalization of Hatred: Challenges for Jews and Christians Today.”

“The meeting took place at a time of challenges both to religious life in general and to each of our communities in their various contexts,” read a communiqué released by the two groups.

Exploring common efforts on migration, peace building

In September, the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC met in Lyon, France, for its annual plenary session. The group released a communiqué focusing on migration and peace building, outlining areas for theological reflection and cooperation. The group’s theological reflections and the work of churches on migration and peace are fueling development of publications on the topics.

WCC, Pontifical Council plan joint project on “Serving a Wounded Humanity”

The WCC Office for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue met in December to reflect on their next joint project, entitled “Serving a Wounded Humanity: Towards Interreligious Solidarity.”

One human family

God’s mission in a fractured world

At a WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism meeting in May, in Helsinki, Finland, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit reflected that mission is the “gearbox” that brings energy to the ecumenical movement and results in action.

“We have a personal, theological, historical, and strategic need for work on mission and evangelism,” said Tveit. “The spirit blows from many new places, bringing life to the church and the ecumenical movement.”

In August, WCC partners in Arusha, Tanzania, reflected on the realities in the communities they serve as they met one year after the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism. They reflected on “Evangelism in Context: Arusha, Tanzania,” exploring current strengths and challenges they see daily on a local level.

A “Mission from the Margins” group gathered in winter to explore how to discern God’s mission in a fractured and unjust world. The working group of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism comprised 13 commissioners, as well as members of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network. The group also reflected deeply on the theme for the upcoming WCC 11th Assembly, “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.”

Faith and Order: theological invitation

Come and See, a theological invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, was published in May 2019 and, for the close-knit study group that laboured to develop it, the journey was life-changing. The special study group, part of the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission, travelled the globe together, discussing in different contexts how to open the doors to common witness with an appreciation of diverse traditions.

The document was presented and launched at a meeting with the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in Helsinki, Finland, in May, as part of a gathering to evaluate and reflect on the Conference of World Mission and Evangelism that took place in Arusha, Tanzania, a year earlier. “Its ecumenicity lies in its method rather than in its object,” explained Rev. Dr Susan Durber, moderator of the Faith and Order Commission.

The Faith and Order Commission also held a meeting in June in Nanjing, China. Hosted by the China Christian Council, the commission met to discuss and make decisions about the results of the work of its three study groups on ecclesiology, moral discernment and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

Rev. Wu Wei, president of the China Christian Council, extended a sincere welcome. “The WCC is the only international church organization that China Christian Council takes part as a member,” reflected Wu.

Planning for the WCC 11th Assembly in 2021

In January in Cyprus, the WCC Assembly Planning Committee (APC) released a report to the WCC executive committee detailing building blocks for the 11th
for the world, the young people are part of the ECHOS Commission, which represents young Christians on a global level. With the theme “Walking with Peace, Reclaiming Hope,” the youth pilgrimage called for healing and reconciliation in Korea, as well as a connectedness to global peace.

Prayer, reflection and dialogue were the backbone of the gathering. While “visiting wounds” from the Korean War and the divided Korean Peninsula, the young people inspired ecumenical engagement from their peers. The meeting, followed by a three-day meeting with the ECHOS Commission on Youth, was also a lead-up to the 11th WCC Assembly.

The pilgrimage ultimately became a journey through division and hope as more than 80 young people from WCC member churches and partners around the world continued their pilgrimage at the Demilitarized Zone, which has divided the Korean Peninsula since 1953. The pilgrimage to the Demilitarized Zone was part of an intense six-day programme, which also included pilgrimages to Daejon and Nogeun-ri, both places bearing names linked to massacres of civilians in 1950. Drawing attention to the wounds and victims left by such atrocities, and to learn about peace, healing and reconciliation of Korea, were key issues in this pilgrimage, which was the first of its kind in that country.

Along the journey, participants reflected together in workshops on what they experienced.

"We want young people to grow and move ahead in their own pilgrimage. This is a way to bring them into the peace discussion, not for the next generation but for us," explained Rev. Nam Ki-Pyung, general secretary of Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea.

The Assembly Worship Planning Committee held its first meeting in the Karlsruhe region in July. Prayer was seen as the heartbeat of the assembly, as members of the committee discussed the framework for interconfessional prayer before going into deeper exploration of the assembly theme.

Suggestions were made for the daily structure of spiritual life at the assembly, as well as elements for the opening and closing services, and the daily common morning prayer. Musicians met separately to start planning, composing and gathering music for the assembly. Suggestions were made for the size and layout of an assembly worship resource book. Central to the discussion was the choosing of biblical texts to guide the spiritual focus of each day. The committee also got the chance to visit the location site of the assembly in Karlsruhe, where they met with city officials as well as representatives from host churches.

The voice of youth in crescendo

In August, young people from all over the world met in Korea to embark on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, and their counterparts at the WCC in Geneva walked in solidarity with them, thousands of miles away but side-by-side in spirit.

With a clarion call for reclaiming peace and hope for the world, the young people are part of the ECHOS Commission, which represents young Christians on a global level. With the theme "Walking with Peace, Reclaiming Hope," the youth pilgrimage called for healing and reconciliation in Korea, as well as a connectedness to global peace.

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WCC Assembly, to be held 8-16 September 2021 in Karlsruhe, Germany. There will be 775 delegates at the assembly.

The APC discussed the theme for the assembly: “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.” In its report, the APC described the 11th Assembly as “a place of listening to each other, building trusted relationships, discerning together the way forward, encouraging each other to work together for change, and celebrating Christ’s gift of love with gratitude and joy.”

Churches in Karlsruhe and across Germany are making headway in preparing to receive the assembly. Set on the banks of the Rhine near the French-German border in the state of Baden-Württemberg in Germany, Karlsruhe will receive tens of thousands of Christians from all over the world, including delegates from WCC member churches, representatives of ecumenical partners, and any number of media representatives and interested public wanting to participate, learn and share what it means to be a Christian in today's world.

“There are high expectations in Karlsruhe, as people are very interested in being part of the assembly, and the region is very proud to host this event,” reflected Oberkirchenrat Dr. Marc Witzenbacher, who serves as local assembly coordinator for the WCC in the period leading up to the assembly. “Yet people are also aware that this is not a local event, and not a German event, but a global event.”

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Along the journey, participants reflected together in workshops on what they experienced.

"We want young people to grow and move ahead in their own pilgrimage. This is a way to bring them into the peace discussion, not for the next generation but for us," explained Rev. Nam Ki-Pyung, general secretary of Ecumenical Youth Council in Korea.
In Fiji, young people “walk the talk” with advocacy

Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow (Isaiah 1:17).

A five-day training programme updated and equipped 29 youth (14 women and 15 men) from 13 countries in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific with the latest information and experiences on key existential issues and how advocacy is conducted, rooted in the Christian faith, in working for justice and peace in communities.

The training, “Congregation-Based Advocacy: Walk the Talk,” was co-facilitated by the WCC Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, the Council for World Mission and the Pacific Conference of Churches. It was held in late August at the Jovili Centre of the Pacific Theological College, in Suva, Fiji.

“We gained understanding on advocacy, from the Christian perspective and practical knowledge on how to do advocacy in key domains of action, in the context of the sustainable development goals,” said Temukisa Kanesha Tuliaupupu from Samoa.

In September, the Moravian Church in Tanzania launched Thursdays in Black.
Moravian women pastors and evangelists said: “Enough is enough: no more rape and violence against women.” Women leaders of the church marched in the streets of Mbeya town wearing black to officially launch the global campaign.

In October, young people visiting schools in Uganda were spreading knowledge and enthusiasm to free the world from sexual and gender-based violence. “Their energy and their zeal is certainly being put to positive use,” said Rev. Pauline Wanjira Njiru, East Africa region coordinator for the WCC Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Advocacy and Initiatives.

An enthusiastic endorsement of Thursdays in Black came from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at its churchwide assembly in August. Welcoming the move, WCC moderator Dr Agnes Abuom referred to gender violence as “a severe pandemic to which the
church must continue to respond” through creating awareness and prophetic action.

**HIV prevention and treatment in light of human dignity**

The WCC’s Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Advocacy and Initiatives (WCC-EHAIA) and its Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (WCC-EAA) worked in partnership with among others the World YWCA and with the Interfaith Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by AIDS to grow WCC advocacy and activism on HIV as an issue of social justice, human dignity and rights at local, national, regional and international levels. In September, an interfaith prayer breakfast in New York City tackled the involvement of faith leaders and faith communities, in partnerships with non-faith actors, to accelerate optimal HIV services to reach all those affected, and to promote action to address issues related to sexual violence against children and HIV. Innovative approaches and joint actions to reach young men, adolescent girls and young women, and HIV-positive children with HIV prevention and treatment services are urgently needed, as well as efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children, which significantly increases their risk of HIV infection. In November, the WCC commemorated World AIDS Day with a focus on making a difference, community by community. World AIDS Day was observed in the context of 16 Days Against Gender-based Violence, an annual international campaign that began on 25 November and ended on 10 December, Human Rights Day. WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit remembered the more than 30 million people who have died from AIDS. “On this World AIDS Day, let us walk the talk and journey with our communities to overcome HIV; let no one be left behind,” said Tveit.

**Education challenges prevailing ideas on masculinities and femininities**

Fifty students from Ugandan universities were educated in challenging patriarchy and sexual and gender-based violence at a training of trainers gathering in Kampala, Uganda, in July. Participants who gathered at Makerere University were then commissioned as ambassadors of positive transformation, in hopes of overcoming the AIDS epidemic by addressing the gender-related causes of new HIV infections among young women and men. “I have benefited immensely from the training, and I pledge to be a resource to my community,” said one male participant from Kyambogo University.

**WCC launches manuals on HIV prevention and gender issues in faith communities**

A set of six manuals produced by the WCC Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy were launched in May in Nairobi, Kenya. The manuals address ecumenical needs for faith-based resources to treat and prevent the spread of HIV, along with education on gender issues. They were presented during a panel discussion as part of the weeklong meeting of the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy and WCC Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance reference and strategy group.

**Churches can promote health**

Among the first fruits of a new strategy for addressing global health, the WCC is developing a toolkit for churches to use in promoting health and healing in their congregations and communities, particularly through health education.

“Join forces, work together”

From convening workshops to launching campaigns, to commissioning “ambassadors” to spread a positive message, the WCC is bridging gaps and debunking myths related to HIV. In February, UNAIDS, the WCC, and the International Catholic Migration Commission hosted a workshop on HIV among migrants and refugees,
addressing myths and mystification about transmittable diseases, such as HIV.

The aim of the workshop was to identify a roadmap for strengthening faith-based organizations’ engagement in collaboration with other sectors, expanding the role of faith-based organizations in addressing HIV risk and providing services to migrants and refugees.

In May, the WCC executive committee released a statement, “Keeping the Faith for an End to AIDS.” “The HIV epidemic has been like no other,” the statement reads. “Over four decades, AIDS has caused tens of millions of deaths, devastated families and communities, and challenged scientists and doctors seeking an effective vaccine or cure.”

While we celebrate recent medical advances that have provided effective methods of prevention and treatment, the epidemic is not over yet, the statement notes.

The push to end statelessness

With workshops and webinars, consultations and Pilgrim Team visits, the WCC has been heightening the visibility of the roughly 12 million people worldwide who are stateless and pushing for the societal and legal changes needed to end it.

The plight of stateless and trafficked people has drawn increasing concern. An international ecumenical consultation held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in May gave serious attention to the plight of stateless and trafficked people, and how to better preserve their human rights.

The consultation, organized by the Christian Conference of Asia and the WCC, drew participants from various parts of Asia. They learned about the plight of stateless people and the link with human trafficking in the Asian context.

A WCC executive committee statement in May urged an end to statelessness so that people will no longer live in legal limbo. “Children constitute over a third of the global stateless population, and in the countries with the 20 largest stateless populations, approximately 70,000 stateless children are born each year,” reads the statement. “Risks of statelessness are often increased in the context of forced displacement and migration.”

The statement also expresses concern over an increase in ethno-nationalist, racist and xenophobic policies globally.

Call for global solidarity for refugees

The WCC was among 25 signatories to a statement released by the UN Refugee Agency entitled “Faith actors Call for Global Solidarity.” The statement was released on World Refugee Day, observed on 20 June. “The diversity of origins and traditions which make humanity unique are being targeted by intolerance, sometimes by brutal violence, and refugees are often on the front line of this assault,” reads the statement. “Based on their religious teachings, as well as on the experience that some of their communities have of being targeted themselves, faith-based actors seek to address xenophobia as one of their special responsibilities.”

The number of displaced people in the world has eclipsed 70 million. Social media campaigns, including #RefugeeForum and #StepWithRefugees also supported solidarity with refugees.

In February, Columbia Theological Seminary and Emory University’s Center for the Study of Law and Religion in partnership with the WCC and other national and global organizations brought together 180 participants for a conference on “Migration and Border Crossings.” The conference, which drew leading theologians, legal scholars, artists, students, leaders of faith communities, activists and others working on the front lines, explored border crossings and migration through the lens of faith, experience and law.
Lights for the future

Islands of hope: Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace focuses on Pacific region

“The Pacific Conference of Churches welcomes you on board our ecumenical canoe, as we sail and voyage together beyond the fringing reefs and rocks of the many issues that affect us here in the Pacific and globally, and set sail with our eyes firmly fixed on the island of hope,” said Rev. Dr James Bhagwan, Pacific Conference of Churches general secretary as he welcomed participants in the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to Fiji in January.

Kicking off the WCC’s 2020 regional focus on the Pacific, the Reference Group of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and the Theological Study Group of the pilgrimage met at the Pacific Theological College, in Suva, Fiji, with the goal of reflecting on the situation in the Pacific through a global thematic focus on climate change and cooperation with churches, national councils of churches in the region, the Pacific Conference of Churches, and others.

In his welcoming words, Bhagwan alluded to the “island of hope” concept, which derives from a WCC document from 2001 entitled “Island of Hope — A Pacific Church Response to Globalisation,” subsequently endorsed by church leaders from the region.

“Island of hope proposes a way of life based on principles that do not exclude or marginalize, and on values that are commonly found in the various Pacific cultures,” said Bhagwan. “It is visionary in its view of the future of our region and we want to share this vision with the global ecumenical family.”

An ongoing commitment to children

Implementing its Child Protection Policy, in 2019 the WCC expanded its firm commitment to protecting and nurturing children.

From a consortium focusing on nurturing values and spirituality in early childhood, to many acknowledgments of the effects of the climate emergency on children, to a WCC executive committee statement observing the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the WCC has made a promise to all children, to respect, protect and fulfill their rights.

WCC and UNICEF celebrated the commitment of churches to children. “Churches can help respond to the urgent demands of the children who march in the streets for our planet,” said moderator of WCC central committee, Dr Agnes Abuom.

A study was developed by the global NGO Arigatou International, entitled “Faith and Children’s Rights.”

“As churches,” said WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, “we have to try to follow the example of Jesus to set children in the centre of our attention.”

A WCC puppet show was also developed to help children everywhere learn about their rights. Puppet characters Theo and Popette explain to children worldwide what the WCC is, and how it cares about children.
In 2019, contributions income remained relatively stable compared with 2018, closing at CHF 17.8 million. Total income increased by CHF 4.9 million, as a result of investment returns, and the first transactions in the Green Village project. CHF 3.5 million was realized in gains on sale of land.

The increase in funds and reserves of CHF 0.7 million is relatively close to forecast. Within that result, restricted funds increased by CHF 2 million, with growth in both the endowment fund and the programme funds. The unrestricted funds reported a drawdown of CHF 1.3 million, including coverage of accelerated depreciation of CHF 1 million, a non-cash item charged to ensure that the value of the office wings of the Ecumenical Centre is reduced over their remaining useful life. The office wings are scheduled to be demolished in 2023.

The Council’s reserves may be assessed in the light of a recent land evaluation, detailed in the notes to the financial statements 2019, which quotes CHF 109 million as the estimated value of the estate of 33,000m² in Grand-Saconnex, Geneva.

The notes to the financial statements 2019 include a first brief summary of potential financial impacts of COVID-19 on the financial situation of the Council.

### Financial Results 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINANCIAL RESULTS 2019 (Swiss francs 000’s)*</th>
<th>Unrestricted and designated funds</th>
<th>Restricted funds</th>
<th>Total funds</th>
<th>Total funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INCOME</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership and other unrestricted contributions</td>
<td>3,947</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3,947</td>
<td>4,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme contributions</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>13,809</td>
<td>13,809</td>
<td>13,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment and currency (losses)/gains</td>
<td>(89)</td>
<td>1,017</td>
<td>1,018</td>
<td>(603)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental income, sales and other income</td>
<td>6,995</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>7,397</td>
<td>7,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain on sale of land</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3,483</td>
<td>3,483</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted income distribution</td>
<td>(3,927)</td>
<td>3,927</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total income</strong></td>
<td>6,926</td>
<td>22,728</td>
<td>29,654</td>
<td>24,773</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EXPENDITURE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme and other operating costs</td>
<td>4,472</td>
<td>9,531</td>
<td>14,003</td>
<td>13,981</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depreciation</td>
<td>2,437</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>2,593</td>
<td>2,676</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>4,293</td>
<td>8,043</td>
<td>12,336</td>
<td>12,582</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redistribution of costs; internal (sales)/charges</td>
<td>(2,959)</td>
<td>2,959</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total costs</strong></td>
<td>8,243</td>
<td>20,689</td>
<td>28,932</td>
<td>29,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfers between funds</strong></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfers to funds</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net (deficit) / surplus for the year</strong></td>
<td>(1,300)</td>
<td>2,040</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>(4,575)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### WCC Expenditure by Programme 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>CHF 000s</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Secretariat</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity, Mission and Ecumenical Relations</td>
<td>1,756</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Witness</td>
<td>4,363</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diakonia</td>
<td>3,178</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecumenical Formation</td>
<td>2,246</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2,026</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transversal issues</td>
<td>1,720</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>17,553</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transversal issues in 2019 included Church and Ecumenical Relations, Youth engagement in the ecumenical movement, Just community of women and men, Inter-religious dialogue and co-operation, and Spiritual life.
WCC SOURCES OF INCOME 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>CHF 000s</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Membership contributions</td>
<td>3 846</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted contributions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme and assembly contributions</td>
<td>13 809</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment and currency net gains</td>
<td>1 018</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental income, sales and other income</td>
<td>7 397</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain on sale of land</td>
<td>3 483</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>29 654</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INCOME TRENDS 2019 (Swiss francs 000’s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Membership and other unrestricted contributions</th>
<th>Programme contributions</th>
<th>Global Christian Forum</th>
<th>Assembly</th>
<th>Other income</th>
<th>Gain on sale of land</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4 388</td>
<td>17 214</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1 021</td>
<td>7 409</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30 049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>4 120</td>
<td>16 871</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 112</td>
<td>8 179</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31 282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>4 206</td>
<td>16 020</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>8 998</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29 362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>3 877</td>
<td>14 651</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>6 948</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25 591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3 928</td>
<td>13 542</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7 483</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25 008</td>
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<td>2017</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>8 074</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25 430</td>
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<td>4 040</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6 765</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24 773</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>3 947</td>
<td>13 431</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>8 415</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29 654</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main contributors

**Note:** The list includes member churches, ecumenical partners and other organizations that contributed more than CHF 20,000 to the WCC in 2019.

African Methodist Episcopal Church, American Baptist Churches USA, Anglican Church of Canada, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in der Schweiz, Brot für die Welt, Brot für Alle, Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration, Christian Aid, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States, Christian Council of Sweden, Church of England, Church of Norway, Church of Scotland, Church of Sweden, Council for World Mission, DanChurchAid, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, Diakonie Auslandshilfe Österreich, Eglise protestante unie de France, EKD - Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, EKD - Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland, Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland, FELM, Finn Church Aid, Fondation pour l’aide au protestantisme réformé, Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia, Hassib Sabbagh Foundation, HEKS - Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz, Keeling Curve Prize, Kerk in Actie, Methodist Church, Nathan Söderblom Memorial Fund, NCC Australia - Act for Peace, New Venture Fund, Norwegian Church Aid, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Presbyterian Church (USA), Presbyterian Church in Canada, Presbyterian Church of Korea, Protestant Church in Switzerland, Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Reformed Church in America, Reformed Church in the Netherlands, Religious Society of Friends, Stichting Rotterdam, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, The Episcopal Church, UNAIDS, UNICEF, United Church of Canada, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Uniting Church in Australia, Uniting Church in Canada, World Communion of Reformed Churches

Other contributors (less than CHF 20,000)

Member churches, ecumenical partners, other organizations, congregations and individuals