Communique issued at the end of the Africa Pre-Conference of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

Recognizing that the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism will take place at Arusha, Tanzania from 8th to 13th March, 2018;

With cognizance that Africa will host this global event in the ecumenical history and the need to make concrete contribution to the content of the conference;

Therefore, we the participants at this Africa Pre-Conference of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, gathered under the auspices of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), from 11th to 15th September 2017, in Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme: “Dignity and Transforming Discipleship: Implications for African World Mission”.

We present the communique, whose content was shaped by worship; paper presentations; plenary and group discussions.

The key issues deliberated focused on prevailing contextual issues, such as: the future of the Church in Africa, governance, poverty, gender issues, youth bulge, environment and climate change.

We recognized that there is numerical increase in the Church in Africa, which is a strength; the increase is mainly in the newer churches. This is not to indicate that there is conflict between the newer churches and the older churches. However, we recognized that there are contradictions in telling the African Church story, with its ever-changing landscape in ideas, practices, and institutions. The ever-changing landscape of African Christianity impacts on ecumenism.

We further acknowledged that issues of gender injustice, exclusion of persons with disabilities, environmental and climate injustice, lack of jobs for the teeming youth, child trafficking, poverty, hunger and starvation are on the increase. We note that these conditions are caused by unequal distribution of economic resources by governments, corruption, crude cultural systems, patriarchy, ill-trained Pastors/leaders, and uncritical prophetic voice of the Church in Africa.

Concerns:
Participants expressed serious concern on the issue of human dignity. It was highlighted as crucial for the Church in Africa to pay attention on safeguarding, knowing that human dignity is a gift from God. The African Church needs to generate the message of hope and pass on to the next generations through the process of mentoring and discipleship, which then becomes a key global mission focus of the African Church.

We recognized that the obstacles that undermine the image of God in humanity are; lack of experiences of transformation, lack of fulfillment and dignity among members of the different
strands of denominations; over dependence of the African Church on foreign narratives and initiatives; emergence of leaders without adequate theological preparations and conflict management skills.

In view of the above observations and concerns, work has to be done to explore how the ever-changing landscapes of Christianity in Africa impact on Ecumenism. To redefine what it means to be African, interrogate the notion of paid clergy and clergy centered model of mission in African Christianity, analyze, explore some popularized egalitarian scriptural passages that promote gender injustice, studying and understanding the differences between religious and ethnic conflicts; and analyze how the society has failed or succeeded on these issues. Finally, the issues of poverty and gender, especially centered around women, children, and persons with disabilities became a focal point of discussions.

Commitments

In light of the above, we as participants drawn from the churches in Africa commit:

1. To explore how the ever-changing landscapes of Christianity in Africa should be seen as a gift and not a threat to the Church’s mission in the world. This requires that we constantly recognize and affirm that diversity characterized the Church from the beginning; it was the gift of the Holy Spirit that the body of Christ has many diverse members to the glory of God’s kingdom.

2. Revisiting the identity of the African Church as a contribution to global mission by appropriating its own identity—this is a commitment to a new African Christianity shaped by the participation of youth, women and men as active participants in the Mission of God (Missio Dei).

3. To project and emphasize biblical and theological hermeneutics that promotes unity, justice and prosperity of human beings and the environment (Romans 8:22). The African Church should commit itself to the ministry of reconciliation, where all religious and ethnic differences are resolved by an appropriation of the ministry of reconciliation given to the Church by God who was and is in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:11-21). The benefits of bio-diversity could also serve as a lens of reading inter-faith and ethnic diversity in Africa.

4. To understanding the extent, causes and forces that continue to perpetuate poverty in Africa and the world. Human dignity is compromised when poverty is heightened by inequality in access of resources, when the natural resources of the continent are not properly used for the abundance of life for all, and the preservation of the environment for future generations.

Call:

The Church in Africa calls on the ecumenical movements at all levels to:
1. Seek through prayer, education and reflection the renewal of the Church. The Church has remained stagnant and fearful of change. The Church has viewed with denigration the changes that have been happening in those churches of other traditions.

2. Explore its theological education so that the teaching models, the content of teaching, and the participation strengthens holistic discipleship, human dignity and community engagement.

3. Take seriously the deep pneumatological dimension of mission that has characterized the growth of African Christianity in the last decades, as against the mission of God that tended to be premised only on Christology.

4. Re-appropriate Christian witness that is not apologetic of the peculiarity of its message, but cognizant of neighbors of other faiths.

5. Champion a prophetic ministry that promotes the unity of the Church, so that it contributes to the cohesion of society, justice, peace and dignity. The undignified situation of the African continent can be transformed; when of divisions are healed and the Church could play an important role, since it possesses the theological resources to make such a contribution.

6. Develop theologically informed strategies to confront and eliminate all forms of oppression.

   *John 10: 10 b “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full”* (NIV)