



Greetings from the Acting General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, to the 22nd Baptist World Congress under the theme “Together”

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace be with you, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It is my honour to extend greetings to you on behalf of the World Council of Churches. I am thankful to the Rev. Dr Elijah M. Brown for this kind invitation.

The theme for your virtual meeting, “Together”, calls you to gather as a worldwide family for fellowship and celebration, reflection and planning, this time in a more globally diverse way than ever, due to the new means of coming together.

Recent times have shown us that only *together* we, as one human family, can overcome the powers of destruction and death. There are many loud voices today; some are dividing, degrading, defaming, discriminating, disorienting, misinforming, and even destroying. As followers of Jesus Christ we are called to proclaim the word of God in a world in which many communicate contradictory, false, and confusing messages as well as to discern God’s work of providence. This discernment requires that we listen carefully, also to one another. We are called to respond together. We are called to respond so that particularly those who desperately need our response, can hear God’s voice of peace, justice, and salvation – through us. Therefore, we are mutually accountable to one another for how we respond to God’s voice - together.

We all trust, in times like ours, that Christ’s love can reconcile and unite us as churches and as humanity. The theme of the next WCC assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany in 2022, “The love of Christ moves the world to reconciliation and unity”, expresses this trust and that the love of Christ compels us to be co-workers of God’s initiative and action for reconciliation and unity. Love is a deep and powerful attitude rooted in compassion and true human relationships, even through mutual belonging, service and self-giving. This is the love Jesus showed us. We read in the Gospel of Matthew 9:35-36 that “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Christ's compassion to all – especially the sick, harassed and helpless – led to action and it is in this context when the mission of the twelve disciples was set out: to proclaim the kingdom of heaven and to minister to the sick. It became a provocation for the powerful which led to the confrontation and finally to his death on the cross. The resurrection shows that Jesus Christ's expressions of love, culminating at the cross, were true signs of God's love and care for all human beings and the whole created world. Our churches need each other and we need one another, because Christ died for all, "so that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and was raised from the dead." (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Christ's love moves us to act, not for own interests, but for the care of others. It is a love that seeks the signs of God's kingdom: justice, peace and reconciliation. It is an act of compassion and solidarity. As Christians we are bound together by the love of Christ. We are called to be disciples of his love, loving one another, transforming the world by love, each in our places and together as the body of Christ, as Paul says: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Dear sisters and brothers, we need one another's concrete expressions of love. The world needs our love in these times of turmoil. Our shared witness in the world must be expressed in love through acts of compassion so that the world may believe in God's all-encompassing love.

Many are listening for God's voice in what you say and decide in this meeting, as you continue to lead in the mission of the Baptist communion. May God be with you in your deliberations and in your prayers, and may God grant you the joy of resurrection. May God's voice continue to guide you and the Baptist churches all over the world.