



Desmond Tutu, Apostle of Reconciliation:

A Memorial Message from the World Council of Churches

For this God is our God forever and ever;

God will guide us even beyond death (Ps 48:14).

We at the World Council of Churches join the chorus praising the life, ministry, and undaunted witness of Desmond Mpilo Tutu.

His passing has been rightly marked and mourned around the world, but what exactly do we grieve, prize, and celebrate in him?

First, we lament the passing of this extraordinary man, even as we celebrate his long life and monumental achievements. Desmond Tutu had the uniquely vibrant personality, infectious laugh, and embrace of life that could disarm opposition and rally allies and followers. He was much loved and very loving. He was a churchman of deep faith and a committed ecumenist. But, as the Nobel Committee noted, he also brought to his work with the South African Council of Churches and the Anglican Church a steely clarity of purpose and an unwavering commitment to social justice for all South Africans. Despite the worldwide fame and praise that his successful work brought him, he remained a humble and earnest servant of God, intent on sharing the love of God for all God's people and the earth.

Second, we commemorate the passing of an era. Like Mohandas Mahatma Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King Jr in the USA, Desmond Tutu's gifts and convictions enabled him to meet the moment when the cries of South Africa's oppressed poor and oppressed rose to confront social injustice and strive nonviolently for social and legal equality and a non-racial future. With a vision of *ubuntu*, an ideal of reconciliation, and a tactic of nonviolence, he, along with Nelson Mandela and so many allies, including the World Council of Churches, decisively helped to overthrow the racist, colonial system of Apartheid and initiate a new era, no less difficult, by pursuing truth and reconciliation. His momentous leadership also inspired and supported a range of other social movements dedicated to justice and peace—for the

poor, women and children, the Palestinians, migrants and stateless people, —and the well-being of the planet.

Third, we mark the passing of a torch. What are the legacy and import of this apostle of reconciliation? What do his vision, his action and advocacy, his service have to teach us in today's world? And what do the ideals of unity and reconciliation mean for us in today's context of global peril, economic inequality, racial reckoning, and jeopardized democratic institutions? At the World Council of Churches, we see ourselves as continuing in that long pilgrimage of justice that Archbishop Tutu walked. In so many ways, we see in his person and faith, his commitments and labours a singular fruit of a century of ecumenical efforts toward renewing and reforming the faith, life and work of Christians and their churches around the world and for the sake of our one humanity. As then, so now, our mission remains to unite our member churches, with other faiths and with partners and allies, together journeying in the sacred cause of justice across a broad front. In the spirit of *ubuntu*, we still seek reconciliation with God, with each other, and with all those our world has left behind, indeed with all creation. That legacy and cause will never pass.



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