

# Called to Transforming Discipleship



Devotions from the World Council of Churches  
Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

Edited by Risto Jukko, Jooseop Keum, (Kay) Kyeong-Ah Woo

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Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

8-13 March 2018  
Arusha, Tanzania

*Edited by Risto Jukko, Jooseop Keum  
and (Kay) Kyeong-Ah Woo*

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## PREFACE

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This set of four Bible studies and 12 devotions from the 2018 World Conference on Mission and Evangelism (CWME) has two primary goals:

- To embrace and implement “The Arusha Call to Discipleship” in our own contexts; and
- To provide “The Arusha Call to Discipleship” and related materials in a mission- and evangelism-themed congregational resource to church groups, mission groups, mission organizations, ecumenical mission partners, and individuals.

The guide is divided into four sections:

- An introduction from the moderator of the commission that sponsored the conference
- Four Bible studies delivered during the Arusha conference
- The text of the Call itself and an explanatory document (the “Accompanying Letter”)
- 12 devotions based on “The Arusha Call to Discipleship.”

Each Bible study includes the biblical passage that served as a basis for reflection, some interpretive reflection from the author on the import of the biblical passage in its own context and in ours, questions to spark and structure group discussion, and a concluding prayer.

Each devotion is structured to include the following seven key sections:

- one aspect of the call to discipleship from the Arusha Call
- a verse from scripture
- reflection questions
- some thoughts about the topic from presenters at the conference
- an invitation to share your stories: witness or activities or action plan and
- a closing prayer from “The Arusha Call to Discipleship.”

To facilitate your Bible study or devotions, whether you do them on your own or in a group, we have placed various additional resources, including a video of the Arusha conference theme song, “*Roho wa Mangu njoo kwetu: Spirit of God, Come to Us Now,*” on the WCC website: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en>.

Other resources from or about the Arusha conference are also available on the WCC website:

- Sample material for small groups (for copyright reasons, we included only a few songs from “Conference Spiritual Life Resources”)
- The official report, *Moving in the Spirit: Report of the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*.

This devotional guide is the work of the Bridge Working Group of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches as a follow-up to the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, which took place in Arusha, Tanzania, on 8-13 March 2018. I am most grateful to the members of the Bridge Working Group, especially Rev. Christoph Anders, Rev. Claudia Bandixen, Prof. Stephen B. Bevans, Rev. Dr Janet Corlett, and Rev. Dr Kenneth Ross for their major contributions to this devotional guide. Acknowledgments also go to our four Bible study—Rev. Merlyn Hyde Riley,

Rev. Dr Sahaya G. Selvam, Rev. Dr Kenneth Mtata, Rev. Prof. Dr Jennifer S. Leath—as well as to Rev. Dr Ester Widiasih and Fr. Dr Lawrence Iwuamadi, for their leadership at the conference and for allowing their work to be reproduced here.

I hope that the radical call to transforming discipleship represented in this devotional guide may inspire you to renew your call, and that these Bible studies and devotions will aid your reflection, prayer, planning, and action as you implement God's call to mission.

*Rev. (Kay) Kyeong-Ah Woo*

*Conference Coordinator, 2018 WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Co-Editor*



# INTRODUCTION

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It is my great honour and privilege as moderator of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) to offer this introduction to *Called to Transforming Discipleship: Devotions from the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*.

Wolfgang Günther once said, “All mission conferences are occasions where we are called to make new discoveries of the grace and power of God, for ourselves, for the Church and the world, to face the new age and the new task with a new consecration.” To me, this is precisely what the Arusha World Mission Conference (WMC) has achieved: a new consecration to face the mission challenges of the new age and also to discover anew the divine grace and power.

The Arusha conference has been, without a doubt, one of the most meaningful and successful ecumenical gatherings in the recent past. CWME has received hundreds of responses and expressions of appreciation and affirmation for the way in which the Arusha conference was organized. Let me share with you just one of those many responses. The late Rev. Dr Robina Winbush, director of ecumenical relations for the Presbyterian Church USA and a distinguished member of the central and executive committees of the World Council of Churches (WCC), wrote in her letter sent to the former director of CWME, Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum, “Without question, it [Arusha] was one of the most meaningful events in my close to 30 years of ecumenical service.”

The conference was also the largest WMC since Edinburgh 1910. Although it was planned for 700 to 800 participants, it ended up accommodating more than a thousand participants. In addition, local people attended as day scholars. The enthusiastic participation of delegates from WCC member churches, mission bodies, and wider constituencies of Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, and Charismatic

churches, exemplified their deep commitment to world mission and church unity.

As planned, Arusha turned out to be truly an *ecumenical* mission conference. In fact, it was the biggest ecumenical gathering since the WCC Busan Assembly in 2013. As an ecumenical gathering, Arusha reflected on the wider issues and major trends of the ecumenical movement from a missiological perspective. As already mentioned, the active participation of the WCC member churches, affiliated bodies, and wider constituencies has been exceptional, making it a meaningful gathering. The leadership of the WCC central committee played a key role in ensuring that it was genuinely an ecumenical mission event. The intensive missiological reflections on the global challenges have generated a renewed interest and vigour in the ecumenical movement. The adoption of “The Arusha Call to Discipleship” through consensus was a great example of this ecumenical spirit that permeated the conference in Arusha.

The Arusha WMC was also designed to be an *African* mission conference, and it was African to the core. It was African not simply in terms of its music, food, and culture, but more importantly through the active presence and participation, leadership, and theological contributions of African leaders. About 32 percent of Arusha participants were African, probably an all-time record in the history of the WCC. African churches have shared their gifts through their profound theological contributions, dynamic missional leadership, and rich spiritual and liturgical life. The conference drew inspiration from the African context in which it met. It was only the second time that a WMC met in Africa; the first was in Achimota in Ghana (1958).

With the centre of gravity of global Christianity having shifted to Africa, Arusha offered an opportunity to *feel* this shift. The “thirst for God” found at the core of African life was plainly felt in Arusha. Hearing from the African Instituted churches and the Pentecostal churches allowed the conference to appreciate their contributions in reshaping African spirituality. The numerical growth of African Christianity is

impressive by any reckoning, yet the churches remain challenged by the extent of poverty, disease, and conflicts that inflict pain and suffering on many. More positively, Africa's deep awareness of the relational dimensions of life and the importance of community life helped the conference to recover life-giving values of the Bible.

The conference was deeply moved by the warm hospitality and generosity offered by the local host committee and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, with close cooperation from other churches, worked tirelessly to make all participants feel at home. The CWME is immensely grateful to all of them for their dedicated leadership.

Arusha was a world *mission* conference. Standing in the long tradition of the International Missionary Council, Arusha has preserved this rich legacy. As in the case of previous WMCs, Arusha reflected deeply on various issues pertaining to mission theology and praxis and sought novel ways of being faithful to God's mission in the world, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Arusha was the first WMC to be held since the adoption of the WCC's new mission statement, *Together towards Life* (TTL). The influence of TTL on the missiological discourse in Arusha was more than obvious. The leading themes of TTL carried forward into the conference. The fundamental affirmation of TTL that God's mission is essentially to give life in abundance was reaffirmed in the Arusha deliberations. The pneumatological turn taken by TTL in regard to the mission of God was reflected in the first part of the conference theme, "Moving in the Spirit..." Through these reflections on the movement of the Spirit and through the spiritual life, Arusha expressed its commitment to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the WCC's flagship programme initiative.

By turning its specific attention to "Transformative Discipleship," a theme that is little developed in TTL, Arusha found a fresh focus for a vision of mission that draws deeply from TTL. Discipleship was affirmed as an invitation to both a relationship and a vocation. It is missionary, as it is led by the Holy Spirit in contexts of time and space

that are in need of transformation. Various aspects of discipleship, such as liberation, gender justice, eco-justice, and inter-religious harmony, were developed in plenary sessions, workshops, Bible studies, and through spiritual life at the conference.

Indeed, prayer and spiritual life were at the heart of the entire conference, and were a major highlight. The conference offered multiple spaces for joyful celebrations. It offered rich opportunities to be in God's presence, rejoicing and lamenting before the triune God. Participants met for daily prayers in the morning, at noon, and in the evening, which proved to be a well from which the participants drank deeply, finding unity and inspiration.

Guided and empowered by the word of God, challenged by reflective Bible studies, enriched by moving musical and artistic performances, and lifted up by the multitude of songs and prayers from all over the world, particularly from Africa, the conference affirmed its commitment to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in life, word, and deed. CWME is profoundly grateful to the spiritual life committee for the rich spiritual life in Arusha.

Yet another highlight of Arusha was the substantial presence and dynamic participation and leadership of youth and women. All along, CWME wanted Arusha to be primarily a young missiologists' conference, and we succeeded to a great extent. About 42 percent of the total participants were women – an all-time high in the history of the ecumenical movement – and youth made up 25 percent. This was by no means a small achievement. The leadership and contributions of young theologians, especially young women missiologists, at the conference was greatly appreciated. The Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) programme, which was successfully co-ordinated both before and during the conference, contributed a great deal to ensuring the youthfulness of Arusha. The contributions of pre-conferences organized by youth, women, and EDAN (Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network) were commendable. Their presence and contributions provided Arusha with a concrete opportunity to live out "mission from the margins."

The unanimous adoption of “The Arusha Call to Discipleship” was a significant achievement of the Arusha WMC. This is an excellent missiological statement which, CWME is certain, will guide and influence the future course of ecumenical missiology. This probably is the greatest achievement of Arusha.

All this was possible due to the abundant grace we received from the triune God and also because of the sincere prayers and support of many, including the central and executive committees of the WCC, in particular their leadership, the AACC, the local host committee in Tanzania, WCC staff colleagues, and many more.

CWME is proud of the fact that we could successfully organize such a meaningful event that was huge both in quantitative and qualitative terms. As moderator of the commission, my sincere gratitude and appreciation go to the entire commission, its conference planning committee, and its executive group, and to the vice moderator, Rev. Dr Janet Corlett, and to the then-director, Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum. Dr Keum deserves special mention here, as he was the chief architect of and brains behind the Arusha WMC. The CWME owes a great deal to him for his vision and commitment to global mission and church unity.

In addition to publishing the Arusha Report Book, the CWME is also bringing out this devotional guide, with spiritual and devotional resources based on “The Arusha Call to Discipleship.” The CWME expresses its profound gratitude to all those who have worked hard in making these resources a reality, especially the members of the working groups, the Bridge Group, spiritual life committee, and Rev. (Kay) Kyeong-Ah Woo, the conference coordinator, for all their hard work. Our special thanks go to the new director of the commission, Rev. Dr Risto Jukko, who in such a short time coordinated everything so efficiently that the time-bound process of publication of the reports was ensured.

It is CWME’s hope that the report and this devotional guide, both the print and the electronic versions, will be used extensively by our churches, mission colleagues, and partners worldwide. For those

who were in Arusha, these resources will help you relive the Arusha experience, and those who could not be there will get a taste of the rich mission banquet that Arusha was!

*In missio Dei*

*Metropolitan Dr Geevarghese Coorilos Nalunnakkal*

*Moderator, WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism*

# BIBLE STUDIES OF THE ARUSHA CONFERENCE

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## 1. FOLLOWING JESUS: BECOMING DISCIPLES, MARK 6:1-13

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MERLYN HYDE RILEY

*He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.*

*Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*

## The Text in Its Context

Our text locates Jesus in his hometown, presumably in and around Nazareth, which means that Jesus is speaking to people who know his birth status and honour rating. He and his antecedents are well-known persons, and from this distinction emerges a dynamic of honour–shame societies. “To be recognized as a prophet in one’s town meant that honor due to other persons and families was diminished. Claims to more than one’s appointed (at birth) share of honor thus threatened others and would eventually trigger attempts to cut the claimant down to size. That dynamic emerges in this text.”<sup>1</sup>

Initially, there was a positive response to Jesus, as the crowd in the synagogue was astonished at his words. But then doubts and questions arose concerning Jesus’ family of origin, blood relations, inherited honour, and social status, among other things. Mark’s gospel emphasizes that Jesus is rejected by his own. His own people showed their lack of faith in him and disowned him (Mark 6:1-6). The hostile reception he received raises the possibility that outsiders are better able to judge the honour of a prophet than those who seem like insiders – his close family and friends. Jesus’ ability to perform mighty miracles required faith, loyalty, and commitment to God. Jesus’ homeland lacked this. This disloyalty is held in stark contrast to the faith of those who came to Jesus for help in Mark 5.

In Mark 6:7-13, Jesus calls the disciples to him and then sends them out with clear instructions. Mark focuses on the disciples’ inability to understand who Jesus is, yet when Jesus calls and sends them out, they are able to carry out the mission, not by their own independent authority, but by Jesus’ authority and ministry. The disciples participated in Jesus’ own activity in bringing about God’s rule. Therefore, the origins of early Christian missionary activity are found in the authority and ministry of Jesus.

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1. B. Malina and R. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 168.

## The Text in Our Context

As we reflect on the theme “Following Jesus: Becoming Disciples,” the text for our study provides further insight into the nature and character of our call to discipleship.

Discipleship is learned through practice and is always tested by the realities confronted in practice. Discipleship is more than learning about Jesus. To become a disciple is to follow Jesus. At the heart of discipleship, then, is Christ-connectedness – a disciple is bound to Christ.

### **Christ-connectedness and Christ-centredness**

The text emphasizes that Christ-connectedness and Christ-centredness are essential to the pursuit of discipleship. This idea is also referred to in John 17:18 and 20:21: “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.... As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” The disciples’ sending was connected with Jesus’ own sending. It is interesting that Jesus instructed and sent the disciples immediately after he visited his hometown. In this mission, the disciples, as Jesus’ representatives, replicated their teacher’s healings, exorcisms, and teaching and preaching ministry. They most likely replicated the teaching they heard from Jesus’ lips and gave reports of what they had seen Jesus do. It is Jesus who called and sent the disciples, just as he was sent to the world.

An important point to keep in mind is that the instructions were not demands, or requirements from which Jesus was exempt. He fulfilled God’s will, even to the point of death on a cross. There was nothing Jesus asked of his disciples that he would not do himself. He demonstrated ultimate obedience when he gave himself on the cross.

***Practical Implications.*** Therefore, we must reflect as leaders on the demands we set for others but may not set for ourselves. Do we have expectations of others that benefit us by increasing our prestige or enhancing our reputations? Before Jesus called the disciples to follow him, he was with the people on the margins. Together with the

people, Jesus faced the realities of the mission. There was no disconnect between what Jesus did and what he called his disciples to do.

Discipleship involves embodying Christ. “Following Jesus: Becoming Disciples” is not possible without recognizing our connectedness to Christ. We go because Jesus sends us, even as he was sent. At the very heart of discipleship, then, must be a connection to Christ. We do not possess independent authority, but we are disciples because of our connectedness to Christ.

### **Hostility**

There is no limit to the sources from which rejection can and will emerge (Mark 3:21, 22, 31). We must remember Jesus’ experiences wherever and whenever discipleship is carried out. Jesus experienced hostility from his own community. He was treated contemptuously by the people of his hometown, the people who knew him well, his relatives. Mark may have seen this rejection as foreshadowing what was to come later in the passion. The early church struggled with this. They wondered: If Jesus is the Messiah, why was he rejected by his own people?

***Practical Implications.*** In “Following Jesus: Becoming Disciples,” we must be open to the experience of hostility and rejection because it comes with the territory. It is sometimes more difficult to witness among our own family and friends and within our own contexts than in other places. Rejection can also come from those outside of our circles, from those who have little knowledge of us. Jesus experienced rejection from every imaginable encounter.

Since rejection is inescapable and unavoidable, we ought to agree that surrender and apathy are not options as we find ways of fulfilling the call to discipleship. It is important that we become self-critical in determining the likely reasons for the rejection and opposition we face. Is it because we live in honour–shame societies? Or do people look at us and determine that they do not want any part of our God, based on what they see? Could it be that the God we present resembles exploitation, empire, economic acquisitiveness, and discrimination?

We must ask what makes it difficult for us to spread the gospel message in our own country, villages, and communities.

People's path to faith is sometimes blocked by myriad visible and invisible obstacles. Yet, thanks be to God, the power of Jesus cannot be eclipsed by a lack of faith. "And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them" (Mark 6:5). Despite rejection, all is not necessarily lost. Even in rejection, there is a place for the disciple to continue the mission. Rather than condemning to hell those who refuse to hear him, Jesus found another way to reach those who rejected him without imposing himself.

### **Authenticity and Authority**

Some people attempted to question Jesus' authenticity and authority by questioning the source of his wisdom and power (Mark 6:2b-3b). "Where did this man get all this?" was prompted in part by the fact that he had not studied with a rabbi and therefore did not have proper credentials. "Is not this the carpenter?" The people were also scandalized by Jesus' lowly origins (6:3). The reference to Jesus as the "son of Mary" could also be understood as an insult. It was unusual in Semitic cultures to refer to a man as the son of his mother, even when the father was dead. Jesus faced a mixture of sarcasm and insult that attempted to undermine his authority and authenticity.

**Practical Implications.** People sometimes judge a disciple's authenticity and authority based on stereotypical considerations of social bias and discrimination, location, religious pedigree, race, class, and gender. These are the realities of socially stratified societies, particularly those influenced by an imperial and colonial history (Jesus' society was stratified, organized by honour–shame designations). Today, many societies with a missionary history tend to exhibit these biases. Some societies uphold an elitist attitude toward other forms of worship and seek to impose their ways on others. This approach often gets in the way of unity and impairs our ability to further the mission of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, some of us devalue our own context and believe others' judgments about our worth. We display signs of discomfort with the gifts and peculiarities that God has bestowed on us and, over time, lose our unique sense of identity.

Here is a note of caution to those of us in the global South who are now experiencing church growth: let us resist the temptation to believe that what we have to offer is more authentic and credible than what takes place in other areas of missional engagement.

In following Jesus and becoming disciples, it is important to remember that authenticity lies in putting into practice what Jesus calls us to do, which is proclaiming the gospel unto repentance regardless of our pedigree, sex, race, class, geographic location, and so on.

Our authority rests in Jesus alone and not in perceived status, resources, or training. This authority is not over people, but over the forces or demons that imprison and dehumanize God's children.

### **Simplicity and Hospitality**

Jesus' instruction to the disciples to take nothing for their journey except a staff, to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics, is subject to different interpretations. But it is not farfetched to see this directive as a call to embrace the value of simplicity and the practice of hospitality.

Disciples are called upon to live lives that affirm dependency on Christ and to practise a discipleship that is devoid of mistrust or suspicion of those who are being served. There ought to be no thought of superiority, and their work should not depend upon a welcoming reception (Mark 6:8-10).

***Practical Implications.*** Those who go out in Jesus' name should do so unencumbered, bringing only what is useful and necessary for their mission and trusting in God's providential care. This goes against the spirit of the age, which glorifies abundance, a spirit that has at times infiltrated the church and distorted the gospel.

For some, mission becomes possible only when we have material resources. In fact, some use limited resources as an excuse for not

being faithful disciples. However, following Jesus is not a journey of material prosperity; rather, it requires trusting God to take care of our needs. There is no place for the spirit of acquisition, which breeds greed. There ought not to be a dissonance between the simplicity of Jesus' life and the way disciples live today.

People are free to reject the ministry and mission. We must respect individuals' freedom. Disciples are not to intimidate or exert force on those they encounter. Such tactics and strategies are used by the proud, who are impressed with their own power and who believe this power gives them authority over others. It is important to recognize that some missions are not led by Christ, but by empire, power, greed, and imperialism. The question must be asked: How have missionaries at given points in time behaved? What has been the history of their connection with the imperial powers of the centres from which they were sent?

There is a time to discuss with those who reject the gospel the consequences of their decision and suggest that they may be acting against their own best interests (Mark 6:11). The urgency of the mission of discipleship requires disciples to move on to the needs of others.

There is also no place for adding to or taking away from the gospel to make it more acceptable and attractive. We must be careful that when presenting the gospel, we do not employ the same strategies that underpin the consumerist and competitive age. The way we live out our discipleship can speak volumes about our authenticity and authority.

The Christ-centred nature of discipleship is lived out through authenticity and authority, hospitality, and simplicity amid hostility. Following Jesus requires us to put into practice the learning we have received, which is always tested by the realities we confront. Despite the rejection and obstacles disciples face, the need for discipleship and the resolve Christians have to pursue the call are always present.

## Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

1. What does it mean to be a disciple in your own context? Do common themes/threads run through the concept of discipleship, or does discipleship vary across time and space?
2. What are some of the implications of a Christ-connected discipleship?
3. What are some of the opportunities and threats facing global mission today?

## Prayer

*Gracious God,  
through your Son, Jesus Christ,  
we have been set an example of what it means to follow you  
and become your disciples.  
Enable and equip us by your Holy Spirit  
to be faithful in responding to your call upon our lives.  
Grant courage to your people  
so that even in the face of rejection,  
we fulfil your calling to be a missionary church,  
participating in the reign of the kingdom of God.  
Amen.*

## 2. TRANSFORMING THE WORLD: JESUS' VISION OF THE KINGDOM, MATTHEW 5:1-16

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SAHAYA G. SELVAM

*When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:*

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

*“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.*

*“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let*

*your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”*

## The Text in Its Context

The selected text is the first part of the Sermon on the Mount, as found in the gospel according to Matthew. Probably, Matthew is collecting various sayings of Jesus delivered in different contexts into a compendium, and placing it at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus (Matt. 5:1–7:29) – just as the missionary instructions are collected in chapter 10, the parables of the kingdom in chapter 13, instructions about the community of God in chapter 18, and the sermon on eschatology is placed toward the end of the gospel (23:1–25:46). These discourses are clearly marked with the phrase “When Jesus had finished saying these things...” (7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1). The five discourses in Matthew could allude to the five books of the Torah.

This text, one of the key passages in the gospels, has three sections:

- Section 1 describes the scenic setting of the first sermon of Jesus.
- Section 2 captures the sermon of Jesus in the aphorisms we refer to as “Beatitudes.”
- Section 3 points out the outcome of living the Beatitudes – we become salt of the earth and light of the world.

In contrast to Luke (6:17), where Jesus delivers the Beatitudes from a level ground, Matthew (5:1) places Jesus on a mountain as he delivers the first of the discourses. Given the Jewish context of the gospel according to Matthew, Jesus is portrayed as the new Moses (see Ex. 19:3-9), now wanting to form a new community of disciples: “he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him” (Matt. 5:1). Moreover, Jesus delivers the discourse while seated, exhibiting authority (Matt. 7:29; Luke 4:20) and appearing to be the

new judge (see also John 8:2). However, his authority is different and his criteria for judgment are new.

What is at the core of his teaching? Jesus is proposing a new definition of righteousness: The righteousness of the members of his community is to surpass the legalistic righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). Righteousness in the mind of Jesus is a response of an individual to the *makarios* (Greek for “blessing”) of God.

“Blessing,” or being “blessed,” is two-dimensional. On the one hand, God blesses human beings. God tells Abraham and even other patriarchs: I will bless you and your descendants (Gen. 12:2). Good harvest, children, peaceful family, wealth, happiness, wisdom are all seen to be blessings from God. On the other hand, the book of Psalms suggests also that the human being blesses God: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Ps. 103); “in the great congregation I will bless the Lord” (Ps. 26:12); “So I will bless you as long as I live” (Ps. 63:4). In the book of Daniel, we find the three young men in the blazing furnace, calling on the whole of creation to join them in blessing the Lord (Dan. 3:23-68 [Greek addition]). This suggests that *makarios* is the sacred space where human beings and God encounter each other. Blessing, in other words, is that very experience of encounter and the outcome of that experience.

Blessing understood as the experience of God in Jesus is the new interpretation of “righteousness.” Blessing is the antecedent and consequence of personal transformation. Being blessed is the source and expression of the individual transformed disciple. When individual disciples experience the blessing of God, they, as a community, become a sign of blessing in the world.

This leads us to the third part of the text (Matt. 5:29-30). This part reiterates that the fruit of the encounter is that the disciples of Jesus, as a community (the “you” here is plural, unlike in Matt. 5:29-30), become salt of the earth and light of the world. “Salt” could have different layers of meaning. In the Hebrew scriptures, salt is associated with covenant (Lev. 2:3; Num. 18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5). Using this connotation, is Jesus telling us that we, his disciples, are the signs

of the covenant of God in the world? Salt is also hidden in food, perceived only in taste. In line with some of the parables of the kingdom (Matt. 13:31, 33), is Jesus telling us that sometimes our virtuous life could lie hidden because it is based on the covenant with God, just as the sign of the covenant lies hidden in the circumcised man, perceived only by him?

In contrast to salt, light is visible and facilitates visibility for others. Light stands as the complementary dimension to salt. Salt lies hidden beneath the earth like the root, and light shows itself like the shoot for the world. In being light of the world, the Christian is compared to the sun – and to Jesus himself, who declared, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). While Christian life is based on a hidden relationship with God in Jesus, it also needs to be explicitly visible before the world, so that the relationship becomes a sign of hope for the world, inviting transformation according to the values of the kingdom.

## The Text in Our Context

Transformation of the world begins, first and foremost, with the individual, even though individuals are part of a community. The individual’s transformation begins with their attitude, their desires, and their priorities. Their desires and priorities are to be focused on the covenantal relationship with God. All will be well with those who are focused on the communion with God. True happiness is an outcome of our focus on the experience of God. This is the core of the Beatitudes. Let us examine each of the aphorisms.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3): What could being poor in spirit mean? In the Hebrew scriptures, widows, orphans, and strangers are considered the poor (Ex. 22:22; Lev. 19:10). They are helpless and vulnerable. They are totally dependent on God. Jesus is saying that all will be well with those who make themselves vulnerable before God. The attitude of total abandonment to God inherits the reign of God.

“Blessed are those who mourn” (Matt. 5:4): Does “mourning” merely mean being depressive or experiencing negative affect? Mourning could also be associated with a deep desire for the beyond. There is a promise that the “dark night of the soul,” which is marked by even a painful longing for God, will one day be satisfied.

“Blessed are the meek” (Matt. 5:5): Meekness could be understood as being humble before the sight of God (Ps. 37:11). It also implies being submissive to the will of God (Num. 12:3). Those who are not arrogant and who are ready to accept the will of God will inherit the earth. In the temptations of Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11), the last of the tests was the possibility to worship something other than God, with a false promise of inheriting “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.” Jesus, however, chooses to “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ promise to those who will bow before God is that they will inherit all that exists. John of the Cross, a great 16th-century mystic, writes,

*Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth. Mine are the nations, the just are mine, and mine the sinners. The angels are mine, and the Mother of God, and all things are mine; and God Himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me. What do you ask, then, and seek, my soul? Yours is all of this, and all is for you. Do not engage yourself in something less, nor pay heed to the crumbs which fall from your Father’s table.*

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matt. 5:6): What is “righteousness”? – a repeated theme in Matthew. Is it obedience to law, or being justified by God? Jesus foresees that the righteousness of his disciples is to exceed mere obedience to the law (Matt. 5:20). We are justified by an experience of God in Jesus (Rom. 3:24). Therefore, those who hunger and thirst to be righteous by means of the experience of God in Jesus will be fulfilled.

“Blessed are the merciful” (Matt. 5:7): Mercy could be understood as forgiveness, pity, compassion, or loving kindness. The experience of the mercy of God is consistently linked to our own willingness to offer mercy to fellow human beings – another repeated theme in Matthew (6:12; 18:35). Those who are able to be empathetic toward others, being sensitive to their suffering, will themselves be embraced by the compassion of the Lord.

“Blessed are the pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8): “Pure of heart” could imply being one-minded about God: like the arrow that is out of the bow on target toward the bullseye. Those who seek God – like the lion hunting its prey with its eyes fixed firmly on the prey, its muscular system entirely geared toward it, and its full attention of mind focused on it – will see God! They will have a *dharshan* of God – the beatific vision of God. In fact, it is God who seeks us out like a lion: we have only to respond to him with purity of heart and see the face of God.<sup>1</sup>

“Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9): Peacemakers are likened to the children of God. How do I deal with my own tendency toward anger, competition, and violence? Do I deal with all that mars the image of God within me? When we deal with all tendency toward discord and dichotomy within ourselves, we become like little children (Matt. 18:3): we enter the kingdom of God; we become part of the reign of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (Matt. 5:10-12): If I embrace the righteousness proposed by Jesus, I am likely to be laughed at. If I make myself vulnerable, living through an inner pain, humble before God and merciful to all, totally being one-minded about God, I am likely to be ridiculed by the values of the world. Do I have the courage to live for the cause of the values of Christ? When I embrace fully the values of the kingdom of God, the reward is also internal, something beyond this world: I am likely to consistently experience a heavenly bliss. As a transformed disciple, I follow Jesus in transforming the world.

1. See: V. J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982).

By living the values of the Beatitudes in our life, as individuals and as a community, we become the salt of the earth. And as a community of disciples transformed by the values of the Beatitudes, we challenge the world that is obsessed by values of pleasure (immediate gratification), power (wanting to be in absolute control of everything and everybody around), and possession (drawing my identity from having rather than being). We become a blessing in the world and invite the world toward an encounter with God. In this way, we become the light of the world.

### Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

1. What do terms such as “blessed” and “happiness” evoke in you personally?
2. What are the challenges that you (as an individual and as a Christian community) face in living the values of the Beatitudes?
3. Called to transform the world, how can a Christian community be salt of the earth and light of the world in the contemporary situation?

### Prayer

*Gracious God,  
 you have so richly blessed us with life,  
 with love and joy,  
 with hope in the midst of despair.  
 Help us to be the salt of the earth.  
 Help us to be the light of the world,  
 sharing with others that which we have received,  
 boldly proclaiming the good news of your love,  
 finding the seeds of your kingdom within us  
 and letting your way grow in our lives and throughout the world.*

*Give us eyes to see the ways you are changing the world in which we live.*

*Give us ears to hear your call to join with you in the great transformation.*

*Hear us now, O God,  
as we pray for the coming of your kingdom.  
Amen.<sup>2</sup>*

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2. Source: This is a prayer by John W. Vest, "Prayers of the People," 21 July 2013, <http://www.fourthchurch.org/prayer/prayers-of-the-people/2013/072113jv.html>.

### 3. TRANSFORMING THE WORLD: EQUIPPING DISCIPLES, 2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21

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KENNETH MTATA

*Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.*

*From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

The theme for this Bible study, “Transforming the World: Equipping Disciples,” works with the assumption that disciples are the agents that drive God’s mission in the world through the power of the Spirit.

For them to carry out this task effectively, they must be equipped. For us to get the best from the main text for this Bible study, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, we should read it in light of the broad context of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. We will look at the text in light of this context and then draw some thematic issues that could be related to the contemporary reader's challenges and opportunities for mission.

In brief, Paul demonstrates clarity in his missionary orientation. He is aware that (a) he is engaging in mission in service only to God, and not to himself or his own interests; (b) he is a mere human who needs the guiding power of the Holy Spirit to discharge his duty of proclaiming Christ even in the midst of opposition; and (c) the success and failure of his missionary execution are dependent on how he nurtures people's relations with God and their relationship with one another.

## The Text in Its Context

Paul did not write letters to the church just for the sake of writing something. Most of the time he sought to respond to a prior communication he had received from the churches he had established; as such, his letters are dialogical and the agenda of the dialogue has been set by Paul's interlocutors. While reconstruction of such context and information about readers is never easy, it is necessary to hear what is going on. As such, we must look at what was going in Corinth that occasioned the writing of this letter.<sup>1</sup>

Due to its strategic location for business routes, Corinth was a very wealthy city. Even when Paul stayed there, he supported his ministry by making tents with his business associates (Acts 18:3). Corinth was administratively run by the Romans through the office of the proconsul. When Paul first visited Corinth, Proconsul Lucius Iunius Gallio (CE 51–52) was in charge. Given the metropolitan nature of the city, several languages would have been spoken there, but Greek and Latin were dominant.

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1. See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor OP, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.

Paul sent the first letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus by Titus, addressing a number of issues related to factions in the church, incest in the congregation, squabbles in the church that ended up in the public courts, chaos at the Lord's supper, loss of love among believers, and even doubts about the resurrection. After dispatching this letter, Paul wanted to know how the church responded. The news from Titus was encouraging. There were many positive changes in Corinth. Actually, the church had responded in "godly grief [that] produces repentance" (2 Cor. 7:10). They had treated Titus very kindly and filled Paul with joy and confidence by their response (2 Cor. 7:5ff).

But Titus had also brought news of negative developments. Some factions and teachers were poisoning the minds of the Corinthians by discrediting the legitimacy of Paul as an apostle and the truth of his message. In their accusations, they pointed out that Paul could not be trusted because he had changed his itinerary (1 Cor. 16:5ff). They accused him of not being genuine, since he had not brought letters of recommendation (2 Cor. 3:1). They assert that while Paul's writings sound bold, in appearance he is timid and weak. They claim that when Paul is present, he is not impressive in his authority and speech (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6). They go on to say that his message was worthless because, unlike the Greek rhetoricians, Paul had not charged any money. They add that the reason why Paul did not want to receive material support from the Corinthians was that he did not love them (2 Cor. 11:11; 12:13ff). They even say that Paul was stealing for the Christians in Jerusalem the collections that the Corinthians were doing (2 Cor. 12:17ff).

Paul argues that he had to delay his visit because he wanted to go not just for a short time, but for a long time, and pointed out that the Corinthians knew better than his accusers about the soundness of his character. Regarding his character, he reminds the Corinthians of his endurance and suffering for the sake of the gospel, to which they were all witnesses (2 Cor. 4–6). He points out that these false apostles, driven by another spirit, use tricks of rhetoric to bring a different gospel, a different Jesus (2 Cor. 11:2ff). Paul's refusal of money shows that he freely received the gospel and did not need to charge for it. Instead, he chose

to work with his own hands (2 Cor. 11:9). Paul promises that when he visits, he will exercise the full force of his apostleship, if it is necessary (2 Cor. 12:14ff; 13:1ff). He hopes that before he arrives, they will take heed of this letter's contents and disregard the false prophets (2 Cor. 13:3ff).

## The Text in Our Context

Our main text for this Bible study, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, is preceded by important highlights of Paul's missionary orientation (5:1-10): namely, that we are human beings on earth, serving God with an orientation toward heaven. Such an understanding demands that we are (a) humble in our engagements, (b) tentative in our judgments, (c) motivated by our desire to please God, and (d) aware that one day we will stand before God's judgment and be held accountable for our responsibilities. In the following section, 2 Corinthians 6:1-13, Paul shows that there is a possibility of losing focus on the mission due to suffering and opposition. The message of salvation must be taken urgently in the realization that every day, those serving God are confronted by forces that threaten their commitment to the mission.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, death is a key threat to human confidence since it is a "mode of being opposed to God's design for humanity"; yet the death of Christ is presented as the "fundamental criterion of human existence."<sup>2</sup> It is important to know this Christ who died. To "know" Christ "according to the flesh" (5:16) is to know him after the principles of the world. To know people according to the flesh would be to know them according to their ethnicity, race, and other such identity markers after the flesh. A look at Jesus from the perspective of transformed life, says Paul, will transform the way Corinthians look at their own life in the world. This issue or orientation raised by Paul is informed by the fact that the Corinthians had entered the church as adult converts, and inevitably brought with them a way of looking at humanity which they had assimilated from a world dominated by sin. They took for granted certain patterns of behaviour simply because

2. Ibid., 57, 58.

they were widespread: for example, jealousy, strife, and party factions were a feature of social life as they knew it. As a result, they were not surprised when these developed within the church; that was the way life was. In response, Paul claimed they were “of the flesh” and “behaving according to human inclinations” (1 Cor. 3:1-14). In his lexicon, “according to human inclinations” means a judgment based on the common estimation of a sinful world (1 Cor. 9:8; 15:32; Gal. 3:15; Rom. 3:5; contrast according to God, 2 Cor. 7:9-10).<sup>3</sup>

But what does Paul mean when he refers to seeing Christ according to the flesh? Obviously, Paul’s understanding is different from that of many modern people who assume that since “Christ was a man like us,” we can understand his humanity by “extrapolating from the observed characteristics of contemporary humanity” – rather, we must first “know the humanity of Christ if we are to discern what is good and bad in human nature, because as the New Adam he reveals what authentic humanity is.”<sup>4</sup> Seeing people only according to the flesh (*kata sarka*) is not only inadequate, but also “tinged with prejudice and bias.”<sup>5</sup> Viewing Jesus according to the flesh is easy for those who do not need to believe in him, because they can see him as a good man – what is difficult is to see him as Lord and Saviour, demanding that you follow him as his disciple. The church can easily join the world in presenting Jesus as being like any other man so it does not offend anyone. If you judge Jesus by human standards, he is not bad at all. But he is more. The evaluation changes once you read verse 14, which states that he died for all! It demands that all respond to this.

## New Creation

In verse 17, Paul says that if one is in Christ, they are a new creation. Paul uses a similar concept in describing the new relationships for the faith community in Galatians 6:14-15: “May I never boast of

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3. Ibid., 59.

4. Ibid., 59, 60.

5. Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1987), 53.

anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!”

In both cases, it is the participation in the cross of Christ that obliterates all forms of flesh-based identities. Scholars are not in full agreement over whether the “new creation” refers to the new eschatological dispensation or to the transformation of the believer here and now. It should be viewed as pointing to both, since the “personal transformation that takes place when someone is ‘in Christ’ is the evidence that the eschatological new creation has begun. Because the new era has dawned, believers can become new people. Because the new era has dawned, renewed relationships are possible. God’s offering of reconciliation goes out through his people (2 Cor. 5:18-20).”<sup>6</sup>

In this new creation, life is not static. It is a dynamic life of discipleship. By joining the Christian through faith and baptism, a person goes through a process of growth in which they are freed from the enslavement of sin (Rom. 6:17) into “a community of opportunity where authentic values reign. As they assimilate the lesson of the death of Christ (2 Cor. 5:15), they are progressively transformed (3:18).”<sup>7</sup>

But this process has stalled in Corinth. “The inauthentic values of the world continued to exercise a divisive influence on the behavior of the community.” The result has a negative effect on the quality of community life, and hence some judge Paul by worldly standards. For Paul, Christ must be re-enthroned as the standard!

Lest the Corinthians assume that transformation is achieved by human ingenuity, Paul shows that it actually has divine origin in that God accomplished it by and through the death of sinless Christ. The “sinlessness of Christ is the common teaching of New Testament writers (John 8:46; 1 John 3:5; Heb. 4:14; 1 Peter 2:22) and derives from their recognition of him as the Messiah, who, as the Righteous One (1 Enoch 38:2), would be ‘pure from sin’ (Ps. of Solomon 17: 41).”<sup>8</sup>

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6. Brenda B. Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2010), 114.

7. Murphy-O’Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 61.

8. *Ibid.*

## Ministry of Reconciliation

The consequence of such new life in Christ, the new creation life, is that of reconciliation:

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:18-20)*

The concept of reconciliation is a key function in Paul's theology. He refers to reconciliation even when he describes other ideas like salvation, atonement, and justification. As it is used in the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul seems to be keen to highlight both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of reconciliation. In its vertical meaning, this reconciliation is a religious or theological concept referring to the mending relationship between human beings and God. In its horizontal relationship, it is referring to the mandate of those who are reconciled to God to seek to reconcile with other human beings, as well as to share the message of reconciliation.

In the theological sense, the following key dimensions are understood to capture the essence:

1. God is always the subject of reconciliation; he is the reconciler who reconciles the world to himself; God is not reconciled and he does not reconcile himself to human beings or to the world; it is always humans that are reconciled to God and are urged to reconcile themselves to him (2 Cor. 5:20);
2. Reconciliation has been effected by the death of Christ (Rom. 5:10);
3. Reconciliation denotes a real change and transformation in the relationship between God and human beings, a restoration

of fellowship with God (2 Cor. 5:18; Rom. 5:10); the change refers to the human side and affects the whole state of life (the language of “new creation” is used);

4. To become effective, reconciliation needs to be appropriated;
5. There is a ministry of reconciliation to be carried out in the world by those who have been reconciled (2 Cor. 5:18-19).<sup>9</sup>

On the anthropological or horizontal level, the notion of reconciliation should be understood from the perspective of the notions of “enmity, hostility, estrangement, and alienation, as well as their counterparts, reconciliation, atonement, friendship, and intimacy,” all of which derive from “social intercourse of human persons or from the relations of ethnic and national groups, such as Jews and Greeks, Palestinians and Romans.”<sup>10</sup>

## Implications for Mission

Looking at the invitation to mission from the perspective of Paul according to 2 Corinthians 5:11-21,<sup>11</sup> one must take seriously the two issues that are basic for equipping the church and disciples for mission today: the orientations of new life, and reconciliation. These should inform our reflection in this Bible study.

Paul’s challenge for the church today regards the legitimacy of the church or members as missionaries. The question Paul would ask the church today is: “Where does your legitimacy to preach the gospel come from?” Does it come from your eloquence? From your economic independence? From your appearance of strength?

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9. Corneliu Constantineanu, *The Social Significance of Reconciliation in Paul’s Theology: Narrative Readings in Romans* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 38-39.

10. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Pauline Theology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967), 162.

11. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Nottingham, U.K.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 28.

He suggests that the starting point is that of being a new creation. Disciples are a new creation since Christ has died for them and ushered them into a new spiritual dispensation. On the other hand, they remain in the flesh and struggle with the realities of sinfulness. While their new identity should give them new eyes to see each other as brothers and sisters equally loved by God in Christ Jesus, their earthly disposition blinds them to their new identity, and hence they still see each other through ethnic and racial lenses. Discipleship in Africa today is still affected by skewed anthropologies. When women are still viewed as sex objects and their leadership potential is marginalized in the church and in society, it shows that we are seeing each other according to the flesh and are not yet living according to our higher calling as new creatures. Globally, the church is still struggling with the bigotry of race and cultural superiority, even though the cross of Christ put all people at the same level. In other words, the equalizing power of the Christ is not yet manifest among the disciples of Christ as long as the new creation is not lived out in human relationships.

There is an opportunity, though, according to Paul. While on the one hand, reconciliation between human beings and God is finished, on the other hand, reconciliation remains a ministry to which disciples are invited and with which they are sent. Walls that separate God's people can be destroyed through the power of reconciliation. This reconciliation is not only between groups that are in conflict over ethnic and cultural differences. This reconciliation is also required between generations. In the churches today, many young people feel that the church that has been passed on to them does not address their needs. Reconciliation means taking seriously the orientation of the other and placing this orientation in meaningful dialogue with one's own. Intergenerational dialogue is fundamental in ensuring that older and younger Christian generations can envision mission as a new shared task. Such intergenerational reconciliation will result in a rediscovery of the shared responsibility between young people and older people in the church. The living church of

Jesus Christ will march out as one reconciled force proclaiming the full message of inviting the world to their God, saying to all, “Be reconciled to God.”

## Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

1. How do you convey the meaning of being a disciple of and ambassador for Christ as a new creation in your context?
2. What does the ministry of reconciliation look like in your community?
3. How can churches and mission institutions continuously equip Christians to be ambassadors for Christ and transformed disciples who can carry out the ministry of reconciliation?
4. As disciples equipped to be a new creation and ambassadors for Christ, in what ways are we able both to transform and to be transformed?

## Prayer

*Loving God,  
through Christ you have called the disciples  
to drive your mission in the world by the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Equip us who profess our faith in you  
with the gifts of the same Spirit  
to discover in which ways we are called to be transformed  
so as to transform the world in ever new ways.  
Amen.*

#### 4. EQUIPPED DISCIPLES: EMBRACING THE CROSS, LUKE 24:1-12

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JENNIFER S. LEATH

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

On 25 June 2015, just days after the massacre of nine people attending Bible study at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina, USA, Sister Mary Tutt and I travelled from Allen AME Church in White Plains, New York, to the site of this slaughter. We arrived to crowds of people lining the street outside the church, preparing to enter it for a final public viewing of the Hon. Rev. Clementa C. Pinckney, one of the victims. Upon arriving in the city of Charleston, we did not delay going to the church;

still, we reached it just minutes before the doors closed. When we arrived, we found familiar faces and seamlessly joined the line. When we entered the sanctuary of Mother Emanuel, we were told, “No cell-phones and no pictures.” This was requested as a matter of respect to the family.

Nine were martyred on 17 June 2015. We viewed the body of one. What did I go to Charleston to see, I wondered, as I passed by Pinckney’s lifeless body, beautifully clad in a robe reflecting his commitment to preaching the good news of Jesus and pastoring people who would follow the way of that good news? What was so important about being present at this vigil that I travelled with Sister Tutt? Why wasn’t it enough to march and organize in White Plains? Why did I feel the visceral need to be inside the TD Arena for his funeral, to mourn with a community of faith that included and far exceeded the AME Church? The answers to these questions elude me. Yet my soul still runs to Charleston; my veins still pump with deep blood calling out to the deep puddles of shed blood; my feet still start to quiver with readiness when I think of June 2015.

## Womanist Theology

Womanist theology is an estuary of Black liberation theology and, to an extent, Latin American liberation theology. In many ways, its evolutionary journey parallels and is interwoven with post-colonial theologies. Surely there are ways that womanist theology precedes these theologies, tapping into ancient moral codes, theological principles, and constructive ways of being community. However, most significantly, the womanist theology that emerges in the United States is a theo-ethical offspring of the transatlantic slave trade and the Afro-diasporic women shaped in and through that trade and its legacies.

In *Coming Apart* (1979), Alice Walker wrote: “A ‘womanist’ is a feminist, only more common.”<sup>1</sup> Just a few years later, in 1983, Walker

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1. Alice Walker, “Coming Apart.” In Layli Phillips (ed.), *The Womanist Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 7, 11. In a footnote on this sentence she explains: “‘Womanist’

would offer an expanded definition of “womanist” in her book of essays entitled *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*. In the third part of the definition she offers, Walker opens the door to boundless possibilities of interdisciplinary engagement. In this part of the definition of “womanist,” she writes: “Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.”<sup>2</sup> Delores S. Williams was the first to develop Walker’s “womanist” in theological studies and to use the term “womanist theology.”

While this brief history of womanist theology may seem tangential in a close study of Luke 24:1-12, it is not. Womanist thought and womanist theology pay close attention to dying and to the death of people who are what Katie G. Cannon calls “hyper(in)visible.”<sup>3</sup> This term is used to express the ways that Black women’s bodies are extremely visible insofar as they are bodies suitable for oppression, suffering, and extermination, but are ignored, erased, and non-existent insofar as they are part of a human community suitable to participate in every level of human engagement and discourse. Like the women at the tomb – “Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James,

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encompasses ‘feminist’ as it is defined in Webster’s, but also means instinctively pro-woman. It is not in the dictionary at all. Nonetheless, it has a strong root in Black women’s culture. It comes (to me) from the word ‘womanish,’ a word our mothers used to describe, and attempt to inhibit, strong, outrageous or outspoken behavior when we were children: ‘You’re acting womanish!’ A labeling that failed, for the most part, to keep us from acting ‘womanish’ whenever we could, that is to say, like our mothers themselves, and like other women we admired. An advantage of using ‘womanist’ is that, because it is from my own culture, I needn’t preface it with the word ‘Black’ (an awkward necessity and a problem I have with the word ‘feminist’), since Blackness is implicit in the term; just as for white women there is apparently no felt need to preface ‘feminist’ with the word ‘white,’ since the word ‘feminist’ is accepted as coming out of white women’s culture.

2. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, 1st ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983).

3. Katie Cannon, “Sexing Black Women: Liberation from the Prisonhouse of Anatomical Authority,” in Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins (eds.), *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11-30.

and the other women with them” – Walker, Williams, and Cannon are among those who go to the tombs and the places of death and dying. They not only go to see what has happened following the crucifixion and death of Jesus, ready to recover what can be recovered of his dead body and to honour the body of Jesus upon his death; they also go to see what has happened following the slaughter of countless Black women, Black men, Black children, and others swept into spaces of hyper(in)visibility. They (and we who walk on the trail they have blazed) go to the old and forgotten tombs of Rebecca Jackson and Recy Taylor; they (and we who walk on the trail they have blazed) go to the fresh tombs of Anthony Lamar Smith, Sandra Bland, and Kiwi Herring.

The specific handling of liberation, suffering, and resurrection in womanist theology as Williams develops it is critically important as we consider Luke 24:1-12. With respect to liberation, Williams refuses to use the exodus as a starting point, despite its thematic fecundity for Black liberation theology. Instead, Williams focuses on the narrative of Hagar as a better descriptive text for liberation in the lives and experiences of Black women. Along with many Indigenous and post-colonial theologians, Williams refuses to fall into the colonizing trap of promoting a flight from slavery. Rather, liberation is expressed in the encounter with the God who sees (Gen. 16:13-14).<sup>4</sup>

Williams also offers an alternative way of thinking about suffering, one that comes from people whose life experiences might well be described in terms of perpetual suffering. With respect to suffering, Williams maintains that “ransom, satisfaction, substitution and moral theories of atonement may not be serviceable for providing an acceptable response to African-American women’s question about redemption and surrogacy.”<sup>5</sup> Instead, she writes that “the womanist theologian uses the sociopolitical thought and action of the African-American woman’s world to show black women their salvation does not depend

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4. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 5-7.

5. *Ibid.*, 164.

upon any form of surrogacy made sacred by traditional and orthodox understandings of Jesus' life and death."<sup>6</sup>

For Williams, the perpetual suffering and subjugation of Black and Brown bodies – and especially women of African descent in the United States – demand a theology that interrupts the suffering, not one that converts it from an abstract concept to a real thing. As long as the cross of Jesus is embraced as an expression of Jesus' surrogacy, for people who have been surrogate sufferers for domestic families, nation states, and every category in between, there is no liberation or salvation in the cross of Jesus. Suffering, for Williams, cannot be applauded or affirmed. Thus, we must be careful how we embrace the cross and what we embrace about the cross.

Williams also provides important insight for this Bible study theme, which connects to the themes of the preceding days: "Transforming the World: Equipping Disciples"; "Equipped Disciples: Embracing the Cross." The carryover from one day to the next emphasizes the serviceability, the practicality, the equipment, and the capacity of those of us who follow the way of Jesus, equipping disciples and, consequently, being equipped disciples. Fundamental to Williams's way of handling the matter of suffering, including the suffering of Jesus on the cross, is the question of equipment. Williams writes of equipment in terms of serviceability. She explores the following question: Is the way we tend to embrace the cross – especially when that looks like embracing and affirming suffering – serviceable or usable equipment for disciples of Jesus? Her answer is no. Consequently, she leads us toward new ways of embracing the cross of Jesus and being equipped as those who would follow the way of Jesus.

Williams offers the following path of embracing the cross. It is one that helps us to read Luke 24. She writes: "The resurrection does not depend upon the cross for life, for the cross only represents historical evil trying to defeat good. The resurrection of Jesus and the flourishing of God's spirit in the world as the result of resurrection represent the life of the *ministerial* vision gaining victory over the evil attempt to kill

6. *Ibid.*, 164.

it.”<sup>7</sup> She goes on to explain: “Thus, to respond meaningfully to black women’s historic experience of surrogacy oppression, the womanist theologian must show that redemption of humans can have nothing to do with any kind of surrogate or substitute role Jesus was reputed to have played in a bloody act that supposedly gained victory over sin and/or evil.”<sup>8</sup>

To be clear, Williams continues: “The cross thus becomes an image of defilement, a gross manifestation of collective human sin. Jesus, then, does not conquer sin through death on the cross. . . . Jesus therefore conquered sin in life, not in death.”<sup>9</sup> For many of us, this reframing is difficult to accept. A reorientation of this magnitude would be revolutionary. Yet Williams invites us to embrace the “*ministerial* vision” of Jesus, the life of Jesus, and the life to which Jesus calls us as disciples. This ministerial vision may lead to and through death, even death on the cross, but the emphasis and the embrace is on the life of righteousness, peace, joy, justice, grace, mercy, and healing that we live every day. For this reason, we can affirm the focus on resurrection texts even in the season of Lent. For this reason, we can affirm the cross of Jesus as a painful and unfortunate, though unsurprising, progression of life in and through the wilderness experiences of both Hagar and Jesus. With Williams, we can affirm that embracing the cross means that the women in Luke 24 encounter the emptiness of the tomb at first perplexed, but then on a mission that continues the ministerial vision. This vision often passes through the crosses we must bear and the cross of Jesus, but it is ever focused on life.

## Key Points about the Text

There are many points about Luke 24:1-12 that are worth keeping in mind. The fact that the women go to the burial grounds of Jesus on

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7. Ibid., 165.

8. Ibid., 165.

9. Ibid., 166.

the sabbath day is one point we must not overlook. These women, who would have attended to the dead body of Jesus had they found it, echo the life of the one who healed on the sabbath day (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17). Surely it is no mistake that the clothes that would have been used on the body of Jesus, long linen strips, were like bandages. There is a sense in which the very cloth used for the burial rites expressed the hope of the bandage: that death might not be final; that what the cloth covers might be healed, helped, or overcome. There is also the fact of the empty tomb. This, ultimately, is the part of the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that cannot, must not, and should not change. The emptiness of the tomb may be explained in a variety of ways, but God provides messengers who make sense of this emptiness, this critical moment of trauma and perplexity.<sup>10</sup>

A most important focus for this text is Luke 24:11. In this verse, the Greek word *λερος* (*leros*) is used to express how the words that the women at the tomb carried back to their community were received. The word is used only once in the Christian scriptures, and is translated in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible as "an idle tale." Many of us might be tempted to believe that it does not matter that women were the ones who found Jesus' empty tomb, that the fact of their gender identity is inconsequential. However, this point is no mistake. We might also be tempted to think that the suggestion that the women's words were an idle tale has nothing to do with their gender. However, those of us who have seen and experienced gender injustice at every level know that a common accusation against women has to do with voice and talk. Women are often accused of gossip and problematic speech. Elsewhere in the Christian scriptures, the speech of women is regulated and disciplined (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:12). Moreover, women have historically been accused of being hysterical. The word and witness of women in legal proceedings and many

10. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, revised and updated edition (Louisville, Ky.; Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1981).

churches is still questioned today. The fact that women are the first witnesses of the resurrection is, therefore, a powerful interruption of the traditions within and outside of the church.<sup>11</sup>

## Remember, Return, and Tell

Luke 24:8-9 clarifies the responsibility and mission to which the larger pericope of the 13 March 2018 study calls us. For sure, there are trials, tribulations, and challenges in our lives that lead us through many burial grounds. In fact, there will be those who live beyond our earthly days who will walk to and through the burial grounds in which our bodies are laid to rest. In the life of discipleship, following the way of Jesus Christ, we will find ourselves arriving at the burial grounds where we expect to find the body and spirit of Jesus. We will bring our very best spices to those places, ready to honour the (dead) body of the Saviour. We will find that the body of our Saviour has disappeared. This experience will perplex us. We will not be sure how best to proceed. We will accost the messengers of God who try to interpret and translate this experience for us. But it will still be difficult for us. Tradition invites us to do what is customary and what we are accustomed to doing. However, equipped disciples who embrace the cross of Jesus as the unfortunate, but unsurprising, occasion of a life of discipleship must be ready to release tradition in order to receive the resurrection. To receive the resurrection, we must be able to remember, return, and tell.

We remember the suffering, but more than that, we remember what Jesus said in life before that final suffering. We participate, as the messengers of God did, in reminding one another, remembering to one another, what Jesus said and did in life. When we remember, however, we must not rely on the crutch of our guilt as persecutors of Jesus and followers of Jesus to justify an atonement interpretation

11. This is still true, notwithstanding Pope Francis's recent affirmation of Mary Magdalene through a Feast Day and the nomenclature of "Apostle to the Apostles". "Mary Magdalene, 'Apostle to the Apostles,' Given Equal Dignity in Feast," accessed 3 October 2017, <https://aleteia.org/2016/06/10/mary-magdalene-apostle-to-the-apostles-given-equal-dignity-in-feast>.

of the cross; the remembrance of our own guilt must inspire us to be better followers of Jesus and companions to Jesus on the Jesus journey.

We return to the places and people where and with whom Jesus dwelt during his earthly life. We do not remain in the vicinity of the burial grounds. We make our way to our sources, our places of origin, the centring places where we find ourselves and our people and where God meets, creates, and recreates us.

We tell what we have seen and what we have done. We tell that we went to the burial grounds intending to express our custom, but were interrupted by the truth of resurrection. We tell that we met messengers at the tomb. Above all, we tell that the tomb of Jesus was empty. We tell what the messengers of God have told us. Our chief pieces of discipleship equipment are our memories, our returning, and our telling.

- What does *remembering* mean in the scripture from the perspective of your tradition?
- What does *returning* mean in the scripture from the perspective of your tradition?
- What does *telling* mean in the scripture from the perspective of your tradition?

Sister Mary Tutt and I travelled to Charleston as a part of our life of faith together. We travelled as mourners, but also as pastor and congregant, as younger woman and older woman, as one who is learning to live and lead in the age of a movement for Black lives and as one who lived through the end of segregation in the South, migration toward the North, and the civil rights movement in the United States.

Together, we *remembered*. We remembered the slaughter that occurred days earlier in Charleston; we remembered the many thousands gone who died in the weeks, days, months, years, decades, and centuries before. We remembered, even though we couldn't take any photos or use our cellphones. We also remembered Jesus. We remembered that Jesus passed through unjust suffering in life and on the

cross. Sister Tutt and I remembered – even though the Rev. Clementa Pinckney’s lifeless body was but a shell in the casket at the front of the sanctuary.

Together, we *returned*. Sister Tutt and I returned to White Plains, New York. We returned to our homes; we returned to our feelings. We returned to the unique trials and challenges, gifts and graces of our shared and individual homes. We returned from the dirges to the everyday life and people from whence we came. Like the women at the tomb of Jesus, like the women who think, write, and live in the womanist spirit, we did not make the tomb our home.

Together, we *told*. Sister Tutt and I did not have the same story. We did not see exactly the same thing, but we did see many of the same things. Our feelings were not exactly the same about what we saw, but we did carry a story back to the places to which we returned. We told of seeing a church. We told of seeing a body, but that the body was not the man who once lived in and through it. We told of seeing fellow members of the AME Church, family, friends, and spectators. We told of seeing a eulogy, one of us seeing from within the arena and one from the screen. We told how the violence and suffering that prompted our travel was senseless. We told of the many who were yet alive and striving to live. We told of a message of “Amazing Grace.” We told in ways similar to those of great clouds of witnesses: Mary Magdalene; Joanna; Mary the mother of James; the other women; Peter, who believed; womanist theologians; and countless others. We told how, like the tomb of Jesus, the casket, the grave – in truth – was empty. And we yet remember, return, and tell the story of resurrection beyond the grave as an embrace of the ministerial vision that, in our experience, leads us through the cross of Jesus.

## Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

1. What do we believe about suffering and the cross? How might we reorient our beliefs about suffering and the cross?
2. Based on your experience of Jesus and on your daily encounter with various people in your community, what does it mean to you to embrace the cross?
3. How would you live out the good news and the ministerial vision of Jesus in your daily lives? How do you live as a missionary disciple of Jesus?
4. What do you remember to tell in ways similar to those of great clouds of witnesses about the hope that the story of the resurrection beyond the grave offers?

## Prayer

*God of life,  
 give us love beyond boundaries;  
 open our eyes to new and deeper meanings of embracing the cross.  
 Lead us to remember, return, and retell the story of the resurrection  
 beyond the grave.  
 May we always aim at that life offered by the resurrected Jesus.  
 As transformed and equipped disciples,  
 help us to work to defeat those historical evils represented by the cross.  
 And, moving in the Spirit,  
 may we embrace the ministerial vision to be transformed and to  
 transform discipleship  
 by lives of righteousness, peace, joy, justice, grace, mercy, and healing.  
 Amen.*



*A procession of students at Makumira University on the opening day of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute, held in conjunction with the world mission conference*



*Indigenous youth met before and during the conference*



*Participants in the conference's stewards programme gather for a group photo*



*The spiritual life of the conference was anchored in daily Bible study*



*Students from around the world met through participation in the conference*



*Embracing the cross, key to transforming discipleship*



*A congregation of over a thousand was joined by international visitors for Sunday service at Mjini Kati Lutheran Church, Arusha*



*Sunday service at Nkwarungo Lutheran Church in Moshi*



*After the Sunday liturgy at Arusha Orthodox Church (Photo by Geoffrey Alemba)*



*Transforming discipleship: signs from a conference session on missional formation*



*Students plant trees as part of their service learning day*



*Elhadi and Hussein plant onions, supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania's sustainable agriculture programme*



## THE ARUSHA CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

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The World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism met in Arusha, Tanzania, from 8-13 March 2018. More than one thousand participants—all of whom are engaged in mission and evangelism—gathered from many different Christian traditions and from every part of the world.

We joyfully celebrated the life-giving movement of the Spirit of God in our time, drawing particular inspiration from African contexts and spiritualities. Through Bible study, common prayer and worship, and by sharing our stories together, we were encouraged to be witnesses to the reign of God that has come to us through the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Despite some glimmers of hope, we had to reckon with death-dealing forces that are shaking the world order and inflicting suffering on many. We observed the shocking accumulation of wealth due to one global financial system, which enriches few and impoverishes many (Isaiah 5:8). This is at the root of many of today's wars, conflicts, ecological devastation, and suffering (1 Timothy 6:10). This global imperial system has made the financial market one of the idols of our time. It has also strengthened cultures of domination and discrimination that continue to marginalize and exclude millions, forcing some among us into conditions of vulnerability and exploitation. We are mindful that people on the margins bear the heaviest burden.

These issues are not new for 2018, but the Holy Spirit continues to move at this time, and urgently calls us as Christian communities to respond with personal and communal conversion, and a transforming discipleship.

Discipleship is both a gift and a calling to be active collaborators with God for the transforming of the world (1 Thessalonians 3:2). In what the church's early theologians called "theosis" or deification, we

share God's grace by sharing God's mission. This journey of discipleship leads us to share and live out God's love in Jesus Christ by seeking justice and peace in ways that are different from the world (John 14:27). Thus, we are responding to Jesus' call to follow him from the margins of our world (Luke 4:16-19).

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

*We are called by our baptism to transforming discipleship: a Christ-connected way of life in a world where many face despair, rejection, loneliness, and worthlessness.*

*We are called to worship the one Triune God—the God of justice, love, and grace—at a time when many worship the false god of the market system (Luke 16:13).*

*We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ—the fullness of life, the repentance and forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life—in word and deed, in a violent world where many are sacrificed to the idols of death (Jeremiah 32:35) and where many have not yet heard the gospel.*

*We are called to joyfully engage in the ways of the Holy Spirit, who empowers people from the margins with agency, in the search for justice and dignity (Acts 1:8; 4:31).*

*We are called to discern the word of God in a world that communicates many contradictory, false, and confusing messages.*

*We are called to care for God's creation, and to be in solidarity with nations severely affected by climate change in the face of a ruthless human-centred exploitation of the environment for consumerism and greed.*

*We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities, in our quest for unity and on our ecumenical journey, in a world that is based upon marginalization and exclusion.*

*We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where the politicization of religious identities often causes conflict.*

*We are called to be formed as servant leaders who demonstrate the way of Christ in a world that privileges power, wealth, and the culture of money (Luke 22:25-27).*

*We are called to break down walls and seek justice with people who are dispossessed and displaced from their lands—including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—and to resist new frontiers and borders that separate and kill (Isaiah 58:6-8).*

*We are called to follow the way of the cross, which challenges elitism, privilege, personal and structural power (Luke 9:23).*

*We are called to live in the light of the resurrection, which offers hope-filled possibilities for transformation.*

*This is a call to transforming discipleship.*

This is not a call that we can answer in our own strength, so the call becomes, in the end, a call to prayer:

*Loving God, we thank you for the gift of life in all its diversity and beauty. Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, we praise you that you came to find the lost, to free the oppressed, to heal the sick, and to convert the self-centred. Holy Spirit, we rejoice that you breathe in the life of the world and are poured out into our hearts. As we live in the Spirit, may we also walk in the Spirit. Grant us faith and courage to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus: becoming pilgrims of justice and peace in our time. For the blessing of your people, the sustaining of the earth, and the glory of your name. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.*



# ACCOMPANYING LETTER TO “THE ARUSHA CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP”

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The purpose of this “Accompanying Letter to “The Arusha Call to Discipleship”” is to offer a sociological and theological context for the Arusha Call. It seeks to give a greater foundation for some of the concepts in the Arusha Call. While the Report of the conference goes into greater depth of the issues raised and outcomes of the pre-conferences and the conference itself, the Accompanying Letter is meant to be a bridge between the report and the Arusha Call.

## **Sociological Context**

The Tanzanian churches and people in their warm hospitality and extensive preparation for the Conference created a space where we could hear the Spirit speaking to us in new and powerful ways. We give thanks to God for the opportunity to gather and discern together in this beautiful country.

In Arusha, we acknowledged the strides that the Church had made in dealing with different social challenges. However, when we heard personal stories of pain and anguish we felt like the strides the Church had made were like a drop in the ocean and the Church needed to do much more in the wake of new realities in the African context and the wider world. The issues that the speakers brought out included those of forced migration, disease and its effects on the population, ecological degradation, war and conflict, gender based violence, appropriation of land, poverty and unemployment, and a reduction of social welfare and security. These issues impacted heavily on the family structures disintegrating them further and thus contributing to the brokenness of the world. We were made aware of the residues of colonialism and the effect of neocolonialism on church and society. All of the speakers named global and local realities that led to exclusion and

marginalization on the basis of social location and sexual identification, particularly highlighting those most vulnerable.

The Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network, Indigenous Youth, and Women's Pre-Conferences noted the particular challenges and gifts these groups bring to the call of discipleship and the work of mission and evangelism. While it is not possible to note all marginalized communities in the world, during the Conference, we did hear from Indigenous Communities, Youth, Women, Sexual Minorities, Differently Abled Persons, Economically Vulnerable Communities about the realities of marginalization. Often members of these groups struggle against theological constructs and missional practices that do not lead to justice and peace. We are challenged to claim a missiology that includes the depth and breadth of God's beloved community.

## Theological Claims

We can and do believe that the Holy Spirit moved over chaos in the beginning of creation, God created life and declared that it was good. God intends for holistic relationships within creation that foster wholeness of life for all.

We can and do believe that God entered a broken and sinful world—a world that was fractured by oppression and torn apart by human greed—through Jesus of Nazareth whom we confess to be the Christ of God. God took on human flesh and moved into neighbourhoods—the neighbourhoods of those living in poverty, dwelling under the occupation of imperial forces, suffering under oppression and struggling with illness in mind, body, and spirit. We have confidence in this Jesus who preached good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, release of the captives and restoration of God's reign (Luke 4:18-19).

We can and do believe that all are called to be disciples through their baptism in Christ. Discipleship is both a gift and a calling, to be active collaborators with God for the transformation of the world. It demands sacrifice, taking up our cross, walking in the power of the

Resurrection, claiming our identity as beloved of God, and a deep connectedness to Christ. For those empowered and privileged and for those restricted to the margins of society and church living under oppression, these are realized in unique ways. For all, being transformed as disciples, God's will becomes our will.

We can and do believe that extending our worship into the world and continuing the "Liturgy after the Liturgy," we are all called as disciples to give a witness of faith to those near and those far off (from everywhere to everywhere), in accordance with the Lord's clear command before His ascension, "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 NRSV).

We can and do believe that we are called to mission and evangelism, sharing the good news in word, deed and life, witnessing to the gospel of grace and truth and offering to the whole world the gifts of God: love, peace, justice, reconciliation, the power of the Cross and of the Resurrection and the expectation of eternal life.

We can and do believe that evangelism in its truest sense is entrusted to the disciples and through them to all believers. Mission is no longer just to the margins. In today's world, the focus is not only the evangelisation of those who do not know Christ, but also the re-evangelisation of those who fail to follow Christ is the unceasing duty of the Church. As we heard stories from the margins from where God is working vibrantly, we saw how mission is emanating from the margins. For those who have been in the centre of power, we must be willing to learn from those on the margins who follow the Liberating Lord.

We can and do believe that we are called into the life-giving mission of the Triune God. By the Spirit we discern and participate in God's mission. As we move in the Spirit we become pilgrims, journeying together and celebrating life in great diversity.

The Christian call to discipleship invites people to worship the God of grace who promises fullness of life for all, to follow in the way of Jesus who said, "I came so that everyone would have life, and have

it in its fullest” (John 10:10 CEV), and to be empowered and transformed by the movement of the Spirit.

Jesus prayed that his followers would reflect the unity of the Triune God, commanded them to do the liberating work of restoring holistic relationships within all creation and gave to his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower them for this work. We claim this as our hope and our calling.

This act of discipleship leads us to live out God’s love in Jesus Christ by inspiring justice and peace in ways that are different from the world (John 14:27). It is the Holy Spirit who accompanies us on the journey of faith, teaching us the way of Christ, empowering us to resist and reject powers of domination that would demand our allegiance and refreshes us for the mission to which we have been called.

We can and do receive and share this faith, both as a personal calling and as a community of followers of Jesus moving toward a life of fullness, giving witness to the ultimate reign of God and God’s intention of a world marked by justice and love. This is a transforming calling and mission. We are transformed personally and collectively and are agents of God’s transforming love in a broken world. We hear this call, which unites us in our hopes and our prayers.

*The Conference Harvesting Committee*

# DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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## TWELVE DEVOTIONS BASED ON "THE ARUSHA CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP"

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### 1. TRANSFORMING DISCIPLESHIP

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called by our baptism to transforming discipleship: a Christ-connected way of life in a world where many face despair, rejection, loneliness, and worthlessness.

#### **Scripture: Romans 6:3-4**

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

#### **Reflection Questions**

1. What kind of transformation is imagined in baptism?
2. What difference will it make to your life if it is Christ-connected?
3. Why do many feel rejected, lonely, and worthless in our time?

## Thoughts from the CWME

“The discipleship which is cast on us at our baptism has both an internal and external dimension. Our inner, personal discipleship arises through our prayer life, our study of and reflection on the scriptures, through the sacraments and worship and through our sharing with fellow believers. We are additionally strengthened through our discipleship within our families and in our worshipping communities. This results in our discipleship in the footsteps of Jesus, bearing witness to the values of his kingdom in our communities, wider society, and in our nation.”

*Bishop Dhilloraj Ranjit Canagasabay, Missional Formation Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

“Acknowledging that the ecclesial landscape is changing and Christianity is shifting to the so-called global South, the need for diverse missiological and interreligious perspectives becomes imperative. This means that women’s missiological perspectives and their ability to contextualize the biblical message in their intercultural and interreligious realities must be recognized. New ways of reading the Bible that challenge patriarchal undertones have emerged. Yet, we must continue challenging cultural and traditional attitudes that are counter to the good news of salvation and liberation.”

*Women in Mission; Women’s Pre-Conference*

“Every few months at Church of All Nations (CAN), we offer a class for visitors who want to become members of our congregation, and by extension, of the church catholic. In the class, we discuss discipleship, membership, and the theological concepts at the core of our community. But the majority of class time is devoted to a 2,000-year overview of the Christian story. Why do we spend so much time discussing history? We see no other way to know who we are as a church, and where we are going, apart from knowing how we got here.”

*Rev. Dr Jin S. Kim, Evangelism Plenary*

“Transformative discipleship is about life in reversal, a readiness to go against the grain of culture, to confront power, challenge the status quo and exemplify a lifestyle marked by the courage to stand up for what is right and a commitment to pursue justice and peace. In this regard, discipleship interpreted contextually is alert to the signs of the times, attuned to the urgency of Jesus’ call to follow him and positioned to offer a path to liberation and hope. Transformative discipleship calls us to think through the meaning of life in the midst of turmoil and consider ways of response in light of the call of Jesus of Nazareth to join him in establishing an alternative community, based on justice and peace, a community in which all are accepted and embraced, and none refused or excluded.”

*Rev. Dr Collin Cowan, Missional Formation Plenary*

“When we want to announce the word of God in a politically fragile context such as the one I described, there is no point in dwelling on its at once striking dark side and feel overly scared. The Congolese people do not need an evangelism that tells them all day long what is wrong with them across the board. They know better than anyone else all the dark forces that plunge them into desperation. They know in their flesh and soul what they endure day after day: the way of the cross for their fate and their misfortunes. What they need is to be shown specifically how the Gospel gives them the physical strength, creates an imaginary of resilience and full life, opens up paths of hope, and makes them stand up to create an alternate destiny.”

*Isis Kangudie Mana, Evangelism Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

## Closing Prayer

*Loving God, we thank you for the gift of life in all its diversity and beauty.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen,  
we praise you that you came to find the lost,  
to free the oppressed,*

*to heal the sick and to convert the self-centred.*

*Holy Spirit, we rejoice that you breathe in the life of the world  
and are poured out into our hearts.*

*As we live in the Spirit, may we also walk in the Spirit.*

*Grant us faith and courage to take up our cross and follow Jesus –  
becoming pilgrims of justice and peace in our time.*

*For the blessing of your people,  
the sustaining of the earth  
and the glory of your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

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## 2. WORSHIP THE ONE TRIUNE GOD

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to worship the one Triune God—the God of justice, love, and grace—at a time when many worship the false god of the market system (Luke 16:13).

### Scripture: Luke 16:13

*“No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”*

### Reflection Questions

1. Why does the “market system” come to be treated like a god?
2. How might you be tempted to worship the market system?
3. What does it mean in practice to put God first in the living of our lives?

### Thoughts from the CWME

“There are new incarnations of Caesar. There are new avatars of Herod. There are new emperors. This is a new imperial era where numerous ‘little empires’ are being created within the orbit of a ‘mega empire’ that is working in hegemonic ways.”

*Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos Nalunnakkal, Opening Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

“Through this narrative, we have learned once again how in many cases the dramatic life circumstances in which people’s lives are shaped play a decisive role in our journey – the path toward the collective ‘us’ on which the Spirit leads us helps us understand our faith and our responsibility, and gives us food for thought and criticism regarding our own life and culture. The real-life stories of women and men allow us to comprehend how not only everyday circumstances but also the major issues of culture, economics, and politics result in pain and suffering or lead to the fulfilment or lack thereof of their desires and joys.”

*Rev. Prof. Néstor Míguez, Opening Plenary*

“Proceeding to some substantial issues, the focus on preaching and the Christocentric focus of much of the evangelization of the churches, requires change in light of the concerns raised in both theological and secular circles. There has to be a trinitarian emphasis, because evangelism does not begin with Jesus. Rather, it must be seen as being initiated by the Father, mediated through the Son, and perfected through the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the work of evangelization commences with the call of Abraham, reaches its summit in the incarnational work of Jesus, and is now advanced through the economy of the Holy Spirit. And this will pave the way for a broader appreciation of the methods of evangelization, which has been limited by underscoring the economy of Jesus Christ alone.”

*Bishop Youhanon Mar Demetrios, Missional Formation Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

## Closing Prayer

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the sustaining of the earth  
and the glory of your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

### 3. PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ—the fullness of life, the repentance and forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life—in word and deed, in a violent world where many are sacrificed to the idols of death (Jeremiah 32:35) and where many have not yet heard the gospel.

#### Scripture: Mark 1:14-15

*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

#### Reflection Questions

1. What do you think is *good* and *news* in the good news of Jesus Christ?
2. What is involved in proclaiming the good news in both “word and deed”?
3. What forms of violence are affecting people in today’s world?

#### Thoughts from the CWME

“Christians are to be called out of a sick society built on the evils of racism, sexism, militarism, exploitation, ecocide, and destructive competition. We are to create a new community of love.... We will have to participate in the broader economic system, but we will not allow capitalist dogma to influence our internal economics. We will draw people from our immediate context of great brokenness, but our

mission will include the casting out of imperial demons and the healing of bodies and souls so that we can relate rightly to our God, our neighbours (human and non-human), and God's good green earth."

*Rev. Dr Jin S. Kim, Evangelism Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

"This is the evangelism that should truly be called prophetic evangelism. It is prophetic in that it sees in a context of death a need for resurrection: where and when sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Rom. 5:20). It does not focus on a catastrophic situation to imprison people to tombs of calamities. Its perspective is to show how Christ came to free the Congo out of his tomb and create a new Congolese man, a new Congolese woman. Through this perspective, faith in Christ empties the Congolese political, economic, and sociocultural tombs of their essence of death; it empties them of their dead bodies so that the Congo and the Congolese come out alive, truly alive, into the plentiful life force."

*Isis Kangudie Mana, Evangelism Plenary*

"We believe that God's gift of hope is that which inspires us to radical engagement with the world as we know it, to the end that healing may be experienced by all and peace become the new basis for life in community. For us, hope is rooted in the subversive theology of the resurrection. Jesus of Nazareth was killed. We all stand to face death in the end, however, for many in the world, the end is constantly present, and the very air they breathe is mixed with the stench of death under systems that steal, destroy, and kill. And they die, in infancy, in their youth, in poverty, before they even live. The news that even death could not hold him is beyond radical. And the invitation to 'Go tell my disciples that I am risen,' to regroup and carry on the mission for which Jesus was killed, is revolutionary."

*Rev. Dr Collin Cowan, Missional Formation Plenary*

“The mission of God is not and has never been neutral. It places us in the path of those who suffer the most, of the people treated unjustly, of the landless or expatriated peasants, of the people who are worth nothing in the eyes of the dominant system, as the classical Pentecostal churches taught us over 100 years ago. One must take up the cross of Christ as the cross of the crucified, of yesterday and of today, as Leonardo Boff, Milton Schwantes and Dom Pedro Casaldáliga, bishop of the Catholic Church who is 90 years old, wrote. Only thus will there be liberation!”

*Rev. Dr Roberto E. Zwetch, Embracing the Cross Plenary*

## Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan

### Closing Prayer

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and the glory of your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

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## 4. ENGAGE IN THE WAYS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to joyfully engage in the ways of the Holy Spirit, who empowers people from the margins with agency, in the search for justice and dignity (Acts 1:8; 4:31).

### Scripture: Matthew 5:6

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”*

### Reflection Questions

1. What does life look like when it has joy?
2. Who are the marginalized people in the place where you live?
3. What does it mean to have “agency”?

### Thoughts from the CWME

“I am Adi Mariana Waqa, I am poor, I am bound, I am unfavoured, I am oppressed! But I am a precious child made in the image of God. I have agency, I am worthy, I have a voice, and I am free! I am free because I live and walk in the Spirit! I am free and I joyfully bear God’s Good News and hope as Christ’s disciple from the margins transforming the world. Thanks be to God!”

*Adi Mariana Waqa, Mission from the Margins Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

“One of the great risks we have when we talk about transformation is becoming superficial in the way we understand it. We should not fall into the trap of looking only at how much we have improved results, more effective evangelism, higher attendance in our meetings, more goodwill, more budgets, etc. That is not transformation in its fundamental sense. We are called to a God-given and God-oriented transformation. That means transformation for the common good and for everybody that God cares about. That means a focus on the whole human being created in the image of God. That means transformation to the better for all of us in our diversity and with our differences. That means transformation in all places – leaving no one behind (as the UN motto for the Sustainable Development Goals says and which we share also as a vision for the transformation given by God). We have a responsibility for the whole of creation. The world in which we are called to be disciples is this world – as it is, as a local home and a global home – the only one we have.”

*Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, Opening Plenary*

“The margins, which in reality account for the majority of humanity today, are the source of our commitment. With power concentrated in the hands of less than 1% of humanity and with the destruction of creation’s resources to provide a scant 10% with abundance while almost half of humanity still suffers from poverty, we must ask ourselves today where life is.”

*Rev. Prof. Néstor Míguez, Opening Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

## Closing Prayer

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*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

## 5. DISCERN THE WORD OF GOD

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to discern the word of God in a world that communicates many contradictory, false, and confusing messages.

### Scripture: 1 John 4:1

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

### Reflection Questions

1. What messages do you hear “the world” communicating today?
2. How do you decide when to say no to some powerful messaging?
3. What gives you confidence that you have discovered what God is saying?

### Thoughts from the CWME

“How to find the way the Spirit moves? The ecumenical experience has taught us: by listening to the Word of God together and learning from one another. There is no way to say that I alone or we alone know the way the wind is blowing. Nobody knows where the wind is blowing, Jesus says (John 3). We all should have a reverence for the mystery in our faith and in our movement. . . . It is only in sharing what the Spirit is doing and has done in our churches and communities and in our encounters with others that makes us able to discern this together.”

*Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, Opening Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

“First, the very idea of discipleship needs to be transformed. Discipleship is often understood merely in the sense of being in a loving, friendly relationship with Jesus. While this is a profound truth, the discipleship that we intend to emphasize is one that is not only a relationship, but is actively engaged in continuing Jesus’ mission in the world. To know Jesus is to follow him in what he did. In what the church’s early theologians called ‘theosis’ or deification, we share God’s nature by sharing in God’s mission. Discipleship, therefore, is what Pope Francis has called ‘missionary discipleship.’ It calls us to witness to Jesus and to the kingdom that he preached, and when appropriate, to proclaim Jesus’ name and his gospel as well. It calls us to an evangelism that is done in Christ’s way.”

*Four Characteristics of the Conference*

“In today’s emerging global context, there is a great challenge to Christian discipleship. This is seen most clearly in the conflict between our formation as disciples in the living Word of God and our formation as possessor-owners in a globalized market society. The tension here is not between Christian faith and a form of economy. Rather, it is the way the ideologies, images, and institutions of market society form human life. Here we find the site of one of our most consequential encounters with the powers and principalities that seek to dominate humanity and creation. The centrality of these issues to our world and to our souls makes this a central focus of our formation as disciples and the development of leaders in Christian community.”

*Bishop Mark MacDonald, Missional Formation Plenary*

“Theological education that is educational and missional not only forms disciples locally, it transforms us by connecting us with the worldwide body of Christ today and through the ages. It gives us a sense of being part of something much greater than our own calling, our particular church community, and our own nation. We are

enabled to empathize with people from many different backgrounds, we become sensitized to issues of justice, and we are introduced to global affairs. Through it, we become connected with the furtherance of humanity and with the redemption of creation. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we are no longer conformed to this world, but able to discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom 12:2).”

*Prof. Kirsteen Kim, Missional Formation Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

### **Closing Prayer**

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*As we live in the Spirit, may we also walk in the Spirit.*

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*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

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## 6. CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to care for God's creation, and to be in solidarity with nations severely affected by climate change in the face of a ruthless human-centered exploitation of the environment for consumerism and greed.

### Scripture: Romans 8:20-22

*For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.*

### Reflection Questions

1. Can you give examples of how climate change is affecting our world?
2. Why are some nations affected more than others by climate change?
3. What does it mean to care for God's creation by the way we live our lives?

### Thoughts from the CWME

"I would call on the church not to limit its theology of mission to the idea of evangelizing people for the sake of nurturing disciples, but to make sure that its mission is able to locate and openly critique the 'economy of the one' that is at the heart of poverty and ecological destruction as well as ... to produce an eco-relational theology of

mission that is Spirit driven – one that is able to link the suffering of the vulnerable to poverty and ecological annihilation, and that is transformative and subversive to promote the ‘economy of life.’”

*Rev. Dr Upolu Vaai, Opening Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

“Human beings, created in the image of God and part of creation, are given the responsibility to care for creation (Gen. 1:26ff). In disobedience, human beings have been the source of destruction of God’s creation through unsustainable production and consumption patterns. The world has already witnessed such damaging results as desertification, pollution, drought, perennial floods, and climate change. Unchecked, this behaviour will lead to the destruction of the planet. This crisis calls for urgent action, including a search for economy of life, ecological justice, and an in-depth reflection on ecotheology.”

*Four Characteristics of the Conference*

“Gospel-Based Discipleship is a serious attempt to provide gospel formation in an Indigenous context. This takes place in a challenging environment. As is found around the world, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from the land in Turtle Island [also known as North America] is accelerated by climate injustice, continuing extreme poverty, and a new type of colonialism associated with the despotic reach of the culture of money. It seeks to be a prophetic alternative to the culture of money, living gospel values in the non-market society of Indigenous cultural life. We pray that it is a part of a larger global movement of the Spirit.”

*Bishop Mark MacDonald, Missional Formation Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

## Closing Prayer

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and the glory of your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

## 7. BELONG TOGETHER IN JUST AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities, in our quest for unity and on our ecumenical journey, in a world that is based upon marginalization and exclusion.

### Scripture: Galatians 3:27-28

*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

### Reflection Questions

1. Who are the people missing at our table? Whom do we need to include in our Christian communities? Whom have we excluded?
2. What forces can you identify that marginalize and exclude?
3. What might be your next steps on “our ecumenical journey”?

### Thoughts from the CWME

“The world is broken. Therefore, it is imperative for the ecumenical movement to boldly witness the unity in the triune God and to live it out for the unity of humanity. The world is yearning for a Christian discipleship which reconciles the broken and troubled world. In order to do so, unity of the church and mission is not an optional agenda.”

*Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum, Opening Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

“Today it is the traumatized people from wars, civil wars, the refugees and the suppressed minorities in different countries. It can be minority tribes, Indigenous peoples, minority religions, homosexuals. All over the world, it is women and children. Often they are suffering from assaults and persecutions and they have traumas; they never have opportunities to articulate their issues and concerns. They live with the experience that no one will listen to them and nobody can help them ... It’s us who have the mission to bring the hope of freedom to the oppressed.”

*Bishop Sofie Petersen, Mission from the Margins Plenary*

“For six years I [a Methodist] engaged in an ecumenical ministry, organized initially by Roman Catholic sisters, with street people, many of whom lived beneath the highway bridges in the city centre. The interaction of residents and volunteers centred on soup ... Weekly we made soup together and we ate soup together ... Then we worshipped together, singing, praying, thanking God for soup and for one another. We were truly on the margins, but the soup under the bridges of São Paulo had an evangelistic impact – inspiring and healing – on the religious and social establishments of that giant metropolis. It opened the eyes of both rich and poor to the power of God’s grace.”

*Thomas G. Kemper, Mission from the Margins Plenary*

“As the story indicates, the marginalized people are already involved in struggles to turn the unjust world upside down. Transforming discipleship here is about following Jesus Christ who is present with them in their acts of resistance to injustice and oppression. It is not enough to say that empires will fall. Like the early church did, we need to announce its fall as if it has already fallen.”

*Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos Nalunnakkal, Opening Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

## Closing Prayer

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and the glory of your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

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## 8. BE FAITHFUL WITNESSES OF GOD'S TRANSFORMING LOVE

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where the politicization of religious identities often causes conflict.

### Scripture: Acts 10:1-2

*In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.*

### Reflection Questions

1. Can you give examples of situations where politicization of religious identities causes conflict?
2. How can we be both faithful witnesses and in dialogue with people of other faiths?
3. Do you know any women and men from other religions? What is your experience with them?

### Thoughts from the CWME

“There is a unique role ... for the churches to play. We are just beginning to understand that equipping disciples for mission and evangelism today must include not only religious literacy and interreligious competencies, but also the courage and humility to embrace the cross for the sake of our neighbours of other religions and world views, and

to defend them against discrimination, bigotry, racism, and violence, regardless of its source.”

*Rev. Kathryn Mary Lohre, Embracing the Cross Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

“The breakdown of relationality is a foundational factor to problems such as gender inequality and economic injustices. This has occurred because we have lost the biblical foundational faith: ‘In the beginning was relationship!’ All of life is an ‘assemblage of relationality,’ after the image of the relational God through Christ who wills for us to be ‘relationally distinct and distinctly relational.’ All of us are meant to exist in an ‘eco-relational household’ where harmony of life is upheld and resources are meant to be shared. In such a household, despite being different in race, gender, and identity, we are all diversely connected through an ‘ecological reference.’ Therefore, nothing exists outside of such reference. Humans are believed to be ‘ecologically formed.’ I stand up here as a portion of the land of my ancestors, alive and breathing because of this mutual connection. The environment is meant to be ‘ecologically structured.’ Communities and societies should be ‘ecologically ordered.’ Our languages are meant to be ‘ecologically nuanced.’ Even God ecologically modifies Godself through the work of the Spirit to be part of eco-relationality. This ‘ecological reference’ informs us that eco-relationality is like a strand in the global mat that connects all of us humans as well as our activities to the soil, ocean, water, trees, sky, and God. This fact is foundational to what is called ‘relational ecumenism.’”

*Rev. Dr Upolu Vaai, Opening Plenary*

“We will never be able to share in God’s great design fully unless we can do that together. From tackling climate change to bringing gender justice, from celebrating creation to proclaiming Christ, we cannot do these things fully and wholeheartedly and effectively unless we do them together, being clear with ourselves and with the waiting

world about what we can say ‘with one voice’ and with confidence and hope, too.”

*Rev. Dr Susan Durber, CWME Plenary*

“The difficult situations refugees and migrants face are discussed worldwide. In some European countries, this has turned out to be crucial for a peaceful coexistence, and debates are often linked with the fact that the majority of refugees do not share Christian faith. Religious polarization and hostility are disturbing trends. Transforming discipleship needs to include the ministry of reconciliation and old questions gain new urgency: What is the place for mission in the dialogue with people of other faith? Christ-oriented and yet open for crossing religious borders in joined action and spirituality for the fullness of life? In many countries, churches are confronted with growing tendencies of populism. Religions are often misused in such contexts, and as a result, mainstream opinions in our societies tend to consider religions as a source for militancy rather than a contribution to peace. Here our witness needs to be committed to the struggle for freedom of religion and belief for all, and we join the prayer ‘God of life, lead us to Justice and Peace!’”

*Rev. Christoph Anders, CWME Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

### Closing Prayer

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*the sustaining of the earth*

*and the glory of your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

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## 9. BE FORMED AS SERVANT LEADERS

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to be formed as servant leaders who demonstrate the way of Christ in a world that privileges power, wealth, and the culture of money (Luke 22:25-27).

### Scripture: Luke 22:25-27

*But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves."*

### Reflection Questions

1. What kind of leadership do you see when power and wealth are the drivers?
2. How do servant leaders differ from the usual kind of leaders?
3. Can you give some examples of women and men, in the past or present, who have proved to be servant leaders?

### Thoughts from the CWME

"The kind of resistance needed in the struggle against the life-denying forces requires that the followers of Jesus Christ are filled with the life-giving Spirit of God that alone can equip people with the necessary resources for transformative discipleship.... Disciples are formed through a process of belonging, believing, becoming, and

participating in order to live out the mission of God as demonstrated through Christ's mission in the church."

*Rev. Dr Mutale Mulenga Kaunda, Opening Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

"Allies of the elites, of the multinationals, of the private banks, supported by a corporative media, took down a president..., leading the country into a political and social crisis never seen before. At this moment, legislative projects are imposing severe losses for the workers, the consequences of which we will know in the near future. Following the global tendency, the loss of workers' rights and the imposition of informality will define, for many years, the life of the majorities, with already foreseen results of increase of extreme poverty, of violence, and of human and environmental degradation, making life not viable mainly for the Brazilian youth. In this context, the Christian churches cannot step back or omit to be involved. If the meaning of their existence is to become historically an instrument of the love and of the compassion of God for God's people, the path to follow will be prophetic and in solidarity with the pain of the world ... The meaning of the evangelizing announcement will propose a trustworthy hope which is rooted in reality. Hope that is incarnated in the life and in the expectations of millions of youth, women, children, elderly, as well as in the migrant people who are increasingly flocking to Brazil in recent years, such as from Haiti, Venezuela, Senegal, Ghana, Palestine, Syria."

*Rev. Dr Roberto E. Zwetch, Embracing the Cross Plenary*

"In view of the above, I dare to believe that the people of my country await the fulfilment of two requirements by the Christian communities: (1) continued attention to the meaning of their cries to God for their current political, economic, and sociocultural situation; and (2) a prophetic act to make people stand up for the changes according to the project that God has for his people in the Congo."

*Isis Kangudie Mana, Evangelism Plenary*

## Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan

### Closing Prayer

*Loving God, we thank you for the gift of life in all its diversity and beauty.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen,  
we praise you that you came to find the lost,  
to free the oppressed,*

*to heal the sick and to convert the self-centred.*

*Holy Spirit, we rejoice that you breathe in the life of the world  
and are poured out into our hearts.*

*As we live in the Spirit, may we also walk in the Spirit.*

*Grant us faith and courage to take up our cross and follow Jesus –  
becoming pilgrims of justice and peace in our time.*

*For the blessing of your people,  
the sustaining of the earth  
and the glory of your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

## 10. BREAK DOWN WALLS AND SEEK JUSTICE

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to break down walls and seek justice with people who are dispossessed and displaced from their lands—including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—and to resist new frontiers and borders that separate and kill (Isaiah 58:6-8).

### Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:19

*You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

### Reflection Questions

1. Why are many people today leaving their homes to become migrants?
2. Why is there so much hostility toward those moving to a new place?
3. Have you met any people who are migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers? How has meeting them affected you?

### Thoughts from the CWME

“We are . . . concerned about the changing global, regional, and national contexts that are increasingly volatile and uncertain. Indeed, challenges facing the global human community have become more: for example, dislocation and displacement of communities due to conflicts and climate change; growing inequality between a few super rich and millions of poor people; growing populism, nationalism, individualism, xenophobia, and racism. Our context and its attendant

challenges demand that mission and discipleship transform lives and communities to accept and respect the dignity of God's image in every human being, and that no one is excluded from the processes of a sustainable, peaceful, just, and prosperous world."

*Dr Agnes Aboum, Opening Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

"As a sign of our commitment to our humanitarian mission, we opened a clinic to help the poor get the medical assistance they needed, serving two dozen Christians who have returned, but mostly thousands of Muslim brothers and sisters."

*His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Embracing the Cross Plenary*

"The way forward for the global mission of the church necessitates that its model of transforming discipleship must eschew its triumphalist domineering heritage and be clothed with respect and humility but also with confidence, not being ashamed of the gospel of Christ in its interreligious dialogue for justice and peace. This model of discipleship formation must also be fully embodied and engendered in order to provide openness to the flourishing of all people, a participatory team of the community of women and men working together."

*Rev. Dr Roderick R. Hewitt, CWME Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

## Closing Prayer

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the sustaining of the earth  
and the glory of your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

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## 11. FOLLOW THE WAY OF THE CROSS

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to follow the way of the cross, which challenges elitism, privilege, personal and structural power (Luke 9:23).

### Scripture: Luke 9:23

*Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."*

### Reflection Questions

1. Can you give examples of the kind of power that is challenged by the way of the cross?
2. What do you think are the main characteristics of the way of the cross?
3. What might the way of the cross mean for you personally at this time?

### Thoughts from the CWME

"Christians face rejection in their societies. Severe forms of rejection lead to persecution, where hatred is expressed in the forms of violence and the desire to exterminate. Christians throughout the world are victims of persecution; large numbers of Christian communities in all continents face persecution on a daily basis. It comes in different forms and varies greatly: it can be the lack of freedom of religious beliefs, or actively killing innocent children or families while they are peacefully praying or worshipping the Lord."

*His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Embracing the Cross Plenary*

## Stories from the CWME

“At the economic level, the reign of misery, suffering, and desperation today spreads its leaden cloak over the minds, hearts, and lives of the people. In the countryside as well as in the outskirts of big cities of the Congo, misery befalls the country before our very eyes with the devastation of innumerable diseases, visible signs of malnutrition in children and adults, the unbounded desolation of women who no longer know which saint to turn to feed their children, and the despair of men before a country where the prospect of paid work seems truly unavailable. The violence of armed groups, official military forces and of rebels on all sides dictates their laws over large parts of the Congolese land. Many men and women feel helpless, without real prospects for a better life.”

*Isis Kangudie Mana, Evangelism Plenary*

“My name is Evangelist, while knowing the pain of refusal to acknowledge my call to leadership in roles and titles of Pastor, Minister, Reverend, Priest, or Bishop, although I know God called me to ordained ministry ... Pan-African women have borne and continue to bear the cross as disciples of Jesus the Christ. You may not know our names, but God does. In the stillness and nightmares of the night and at the dawn of the day, God has called us and is calling us. Are you listening with us? The cross is ours to bear, but so is the great resurrection!”

*Rev. Dr Angelique Walker-Smith, Embracing the Cross Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

## Closing Prayer

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the sustaining of the earth  
and the glory of your name.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

*Amen.*

## 12. LIVE IN THE LIGHT OF THE RESURRECTION

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called to live in the light of the resurrection, which offers hope-filled possibilities for transformation.

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:14, Romans 15:13**

*If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.*

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

### Reflection Questions

1. What difference does the resurrection of Christ make to the way we live our lives?
2. What kind of transformation can you imagine in view of Christ's resurrection?
3. In your own context, what "hope-filled possibilities" can you identify?

### Thoughts from the CWME

"Jesus' calling of his first disciples was set in the context of the forces of empire that tempted him with popularity and pleasure over the principles of obedience and faithfulness to God. Jesus, having resisted the temptations, presented himself to the community as one not easily sold to the scandal of seduction. His call 'Come, follow

me' is a statement of rejection of the status quo, and a declaration of an alternative. It is an invitation to defy the established order, divesting oneself of all that is known and held dear, to participate in God's work of transformation ... being ready to go against the grain of culture, to confront power, challenge status quo and exemplify a lifestyle marked by courage to stand up for what is right and commitment to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8)."

*Rev. Dr Collin Cowan, Sending Service*

## Stories from the CWME

"Transforming discipleship begins with a missional community, which embodies a community of faith that allows all to belong, believe, and become in order to fully participate. The teaching and learning process is never neutral; therefore, if the church seeks transforming discipleship for all, then for African women missional engagement that is consistent with the Spirit of Life must embrace all aspects of life to respond to the felt needs of people, both physical and spiritual."

*Rev. Dr Mutale Mulenga Kaunda, Opening Plenary*

"We seek to pool our people's resources, talents, ideas, and labour for the common good. We want our members to feel that their work is rewarding, that the fruit of their labour is being shared justly, that they work together, live together, play together, and pray together because it is very good and pleasant when kindred live together in unity. We will have to participate in the broader economic system, but we will not allow capitalist dogma to influence our internal economics. We will draw people from our immediate context of great brokenness, but our mission will include the casting out of imperial demons and the healing of bodies and souls so that we can relate rightly to our God, our neighbours (human and non-human), and God's good green earth. We aspire to create an urban village founded on the love and

teachings of Jesus Christ our Lord, to live life together, and to share God's abundance with an impoverished world."

*Rev. Dr Jin S. Kim, Evangelism Plenary*

"'Come and see!' That is a key concept in evangelical and missionary work. It is an invitation, an invitation to live, to live all together in a different, original, free, new, creative way, in awareness that atomization, individualism, and isolation are not situations that lead us to God. The Gospel, the good news, is lived out in community, all together, with one another, and in one another, sharing the life-giving Word and food, just as the apostles and their successors did."

*Bishop Isif de Pátara, Evangelism Plenary*

**Share your stories: witness or activities or action plan**

### **Closing Prayer**

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*Amen.*

## AFTERWORD

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This devotional guide, based on “The Arusha Call to Discipleship,” reflects one result of the shift of Christianity to the global South, where spirituality is often experienced more holistically than in the global North. It is clear that, with the extension of Global Christianity to all over the world, and with local congregations being on the front lines of witnessing to Christ, the question of their worship and spirituality is something to which mission pays, and will pay, much attention.

Often the best parts of international conferences are available only to those who could attend them. Even though the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches – held in Arusha, Tanzania, in March 2018 with 1,024 participants – was the largest world missionary conference organized by the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism since the world missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910, the remark is still pertinent. That is why we decided to make available not only the contents of speeches, discourses, panel discussions, addresses, messages, and so on delivered during the conference and found in the *Arusha Report*, but also something of the rich spirituality experienced through the Bible studies, prayers, meditations, songs, mutual sharing, and theatre – all of which reflect ecumenical, global, and, in particular, African spirituality.

The devotional guide is meant for all Christians all over the world: for pastors, mission leaders and ecumenical officers, lay leaders, as well as any parish member. It is a contribution meant to be used by all those who want to follow Jesus Christ and identify him as the risen Lord of their lives. In other words, it is meant for all those who have heard the call of Christ to transforming discipleship and have answered “yes” to that call, and thus want to follow Jesus and participate in God’s mission in this world, no matter where they are. The guide can be used in

Bible study groups, in prayer groups, in mission gatherings, even in worship services.

A great word of thanks goes to all those who have made their material available and who helped us to make this devotional guide and its publication possible.

We hope and pray that it can be a tool for you, a follower of Christ, to become more his disciple, encouraging you daily to a more self-emptying, cross-bearing, and witnessing life in your environment – in fact, to become more like the Master you are following. Through his Spirit, he has promised to be with us always, “to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

*Rev. Dr Risto Jukka*

*Director, WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism*

*Co-Editor*

# Called to transforming discipleship—

What does it mean to live an authentic Christian life today?

This brief volume offers four Bible studies and a dozen devotions for individuals and groups to use as they answer this question for their own lives and contexts.

Inspired by spiritual resources developed in conjunction with the 2018 World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, these reflections, meditations, and prayers will inspire and encourage all Christians to find and renew their call to discipleship that transforms themselves and their world.



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