

Joint Working Group
between the
Roman Catholic Church
and the
World Council of Churches



Tenth Report Study Documents

Peace is a Treasure for All

*An Ecumenical Reflection on Peacebuilding
in Situations of Conflict and Violence*

Migrants and Refugees

Ecumenical Challenges and Opportunities

GENEVA-ROME 2022

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WCC Publications is the book publishing programme of the World Council of Churches. The WCC is a worldwide fellowship of 352 member churches which represents more than half a billion Christians around the world. The WCC calls its member churches to seek unity, a common public witness and service to others in a world where hope and solidarity are the seeds for justice and peace. The WCC works with people of all faiths seeking reconciliation with the goal of justice, peace, and a more equitable world.

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Production: Lyn van Rooyen, coordinator WCC Publications

Book design and typesetting: Beth Oberhotzer

ISBN: 978-2-8254-1818-5

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Introduction

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21).¹ The risen Lord sends his disciples today into a broken world overwhelmed by despair and frustration, oppression and violence. The Lord sends Christians as peacebuilders to be agents of healing and reconciliation. This mission requires Christians to engage with one another, with the followers of other religions, and with all people of goodwill.

What is the particular role of churches and Christians as peacebuilders in situations of conflict and violence? What are the ecumenical challenges and opportunities involved in working together for peace? The Joint Working Group (JWG), as an instrument that was instituted to foster greater cooperation between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), seeks to encourage its parent bodies to intensify their collaboration in practical peacebuilding efforts. This work is based on the theological, pastoral, and ethical reflections on peacebuilding as expressed in the documents of the WCC and the RCC.²

It is a shared Christian conviction that the quest for peace involves many levels of action. Indeed, the search for peace includes the dimensions of prevention, protection, and mediation. It requires a culture committed to fostering peace. Christians are called to be co-workers in God’s mission of building a culture of peace that permeates all of church life and mission.³ This mission includes a commitment to ecumenical, interreligious, and intercultural dialogue, and practical cooperation for justice and peace.

In addressing peacebuilding in situations of conflict and violence, the JWG considers the impact of culture, religion, and dialogue. We recognize that culture and religion cannot be clearly separated—in fact, the relationship and interactions between them are complex. Nevertheless, we first ask what peace is from the perspectives of *culture*, *religion*, and *dialogue*. We continue by reflecting on what threatens peace from these same three vantage points.

1. Biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise indicated.

2. World Council of Churches, *Just Peace Companion*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 19ff; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

3. See PCJP, *Compendium*, §488–96, and WCC, *Just Peace Companion*, 26–28.

We had planned to conclude by asking what contributes to peace from these three perspectives, but in view of the COVID-19 crisis, we add reflections on the social and political impacts of the pandemic that seriously affect international peace and security. Finally, we formulate recommendations to the parent bodies. Our text and recommendations will consider carefully the nexus between individual, social, and political responsibilities.

1. What is peace?

Culture

In the understanding of the JWG, human beings are totally immersed in culture. Cultures function as basic textures of societies. Expressed in symbols, rituals, myths, architecture, music, the arts, language, literature, sciences, sociality, economics, political orders, philosophies, religious traditions, and theologies, cultures manifest a threefold relationship of the human person: with the cosmos and the earth, with other members of society, and with the transcendent and the divine. In this sense, cultures are the context in which peacebuilding takes place.

Peacebuilding is a central issue in local, regional, and global contexts. Peace flourishes and enhances life under conditions of truth, justice, love, and freedom. Even though there may be no single definition of peace, people across cultures share a desire for peace. Peace entails more than the absence of war, violence, oppression, and persecution. It requires a common vision of a life of dignity and wellbeing for all. The recognition of human dignity involves respect for, and understanding of, others and is grounded in the affirmation of their value as human beings, along with a commitment to values such as justice, solidarity, compassion, and mutual acceptance.

Religion

Peace is rooted in values and virtues stemming from convictions and practices that in many cases are rooted in religious beliefs. Christians find in the Bible that peace is intimately related to justice, truth, and mercy. “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10–11, KJV). Peace is the fruit of justice (Is. 32:17), the shalom of all creation (Is. 65:17–25). It is a precondition for the fullness of life (John 10:10). Jesus declares, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9). Jesus proclaims the reign of God as a realm of peace, and justice and peace as essential for the children of God.

As the body of Christ and community of believers, the Church is entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). This ministry is directed toward peace, and it requires an emphasis on distributive and restorative justice (Neh. 5:1–13; Matt. 5:23–24; Rev. 22:1–3).

According to the Christian understanding, peace starts with God's intention for peace, the recognition of sin, and the need for reconciliation with God as well as with one's fellow creatures and the entire creation. Christian spirituality places a significant emphasis on inner peace, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit and which is important for dialogue and mediation. Inner peace is also a factor in discerning God's will for effective action in the world (Rom. 8:38–39; Gal. 5:22–23; John 14:16,26; 15:26; Rom. 12:2).

The RCC and the WCC agree in their understanding of peace as being bound to the recognition of human dignity and equality. For both bodies, social justice and social development are essential conditions for human flourishing in peaceful relationships. For example, in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis states:

Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. [...] Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised. [...] In the end, a peace which is not the result of integral development will be doomed; it will always spawn new conflicts and various forms of violence.⁴

The WCC also highlights these essential conditions in *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace*⁵—for example, in “Let the Scriptures speak,” paragraph 3:

4. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 218–19, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

5. World Council of Churches, *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2011), 2–4, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/ecumenical-call-to-just-peace>.

The Bible makes justice the inseparable companion of peace (Isaiah 32:17; James 3:18). Both point to right and sustainable relationships in human society, the vitality of our connections with the earth, the “well-being” and integrity of creation. Peace is God’s gift to a broken but beloved world, today as in the lifetime of Jesus Christ: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.” (John 14:27). Through the life and teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we perceive peace as both promise and present—a hope for the future and a gift here and now.

And in “The way of just peace,” paragraph 11:

Within the limitations of tongue and intellect, we propose that Just Peace may be comprehended as a collective and dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.

It is commonly recognized that just peace includes care for the whole creation. Thus, peacebuilding involves joint engagement for the preservation and restoration of integral ecosystems. The WCC states:

Peace is an embrace of all creation. Our relations with God, with one another and with the earth are not based on the pursuit of interest or arbitrary choice. They are the bonds of love. In Jesus Christ, who is our peace (Eph. 2:14), God has entered the world, knows our brokenness, embraces our vulnerability, and is reconciling all things in himself (Col. 1:19-20). As created in the image of God and thus participating in the divine communion, human beings have the potential to build peace and overcome violence. They are called to act as mediators and “priests of creation” co-operating with God in resisting the forces of death and destruction. [...] Glory to God (*doxa*) is manifested in the building (*praxis*) of peace.⁶

In a similar way, in *Laudato si'* Pope Francis argues as follows:

“Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated indi-

6. WCC, *Just Peace Companion*, 25-26.

vidually without once again falling into reductionism.” Everything is related and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.⁷

Christians believe that peace is God’s gift. Bonds of love with one another and with all of creation are rooted in Christ. Christians pray that the Holy Spirit may guide them as they pursue justice and integral human development for the common good of all societies and for humanity as a whole. By treasuring this gift and building peace, Christians give glory to God.

Dialogue

Dialogue is fundamental to human communication and community. As such, it is a vital resource for mutual recognition and relationships. Dialogue is an encounter that requires us to be open to and respectful of the diversity, dignity, and integrity of the other and of ourselves. Dialogue also creates the framework for taking common action to overcome structural injustice. Successful, authentic dialogue can facilitate peace by promoting understanding, creating the conditions for reconciliation, and preventing conflict and hostility.

Christians engage in dialogue because of their call to witness to the reign of God in an imperfect world. This commitment leads Christians to respond to the gospel imperatives of loving their neighbours, rejecting violence, and seeking justice for all—especially for the poor, the disinherited, and the oppressed (Matt. 5:1–12; Luke 4:18). To build just and sustainable societies, the contributions of Christians, followers of other religions, and all people of goodwill are necessary.

From the perspective of dialogue, peacebuilding is inclusive and acknowledges the validity of voices that are often excluded from the dialogue table. Diversity at the dialogue table also helps us to understand the complexity of the peace process itself. A constructive process of encounter and dialogue is essential to the peacebuilding process. Such a dialogue process includes:

7. Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 92. This reference cites *Pastoral Letter Sobre la relación del hombre con la naturaleza* of the Conference of Dominican Bishops (21 January 1987).

- sharing stories of suffering and pain caused by conflict and oppression
- gaining a shared understanding of the causes of conflict and the need for healing
- addressing the asymmetries of power and structure
- identifying misunderstandings and prejudices in order to explore convergences and divergences
- discerning the voice and work of the Spirit in order to reconcile and heal memories
- developing a new shared narrative for living together in peace

The churches are called to play a peacebuilding role in situations of conflict and violence, and in post-conflict reconciliation processes. Churches have been involved in peacebuilding processes in a range of conflicts and can draw on these experiences.⁸ Dialogue is critical in prevention, mediation, and reconciliation. Some ecumenical dialogues between the churches provide models of how to overcome enmity and develop a new narrative that enables Christians to build lasting peace through relationships with one another.⁹

2. What threatens peace?

Culture

Major cultural phenomena such as globalization, mass media, and migration have the potential to threaten peace. Political boundaries are often redrawn to coincide with cultural identities—of race, ethnicity, caste, class, language, nation, and religion. Alliances and divisions can arise within and across cultures. As a result, cultural conflicts arise even within a society. In many cases, power structures, geopolitical competitions, and the wounding of colonial-

8. These include for example: Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Central African Republic, and the Korean peninsula.

9. See, for example, *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ. Report of the Lutheran–Mennonite International Study Commission* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation; Strasbourg: Mennonite World Conference, 2010); The Lutheran World Federation and The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. Report of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt; Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2013).

ism and neo-colonialism are at the root of violence and war.¹⁰ Interference with local conflicts by those with power for geopolitical interests undermines communities and leads to further violence and war. Women, children, and vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected.

Cultures all over the globe are influenced, if not shaped, in positive or negative ways by the processes of globalization.¹¹ Globalization of solidarity and interdependence needs to be strengthened; globalization of indifference, individualism, consumerism, and exploitation needs to be challenged. Economic globalization has major effects in terms of just or unjust social conditions between and within societies. The recognition of interdependence requires a renewed vision of international solidarity. Globalization triggers localization and “glocalization” that require discernment to determine which values are to be promoted in the given context at a particular time.

Models of globalization in which few profit and many are exploited, excluded and marginalized create new dimensions of polarization. “Such an economy kills.”¹² Globalization as it operates today leads to increased insecurity in several spheres—wealth, health, environment, and politics. These insecurities sow the seeds of, and exacerbate, social and cultural conflicts. New forms of protectionism give rise to greater exclusion and inequality, with consequences at the local, regional, and global levels. The process of globalization and resulting insecurities can lead to cultural domination, exclusion, and even annihilation (as, for example, the annihilation of Indigenous cultures). Affirming one’s own identity while negating others’ identities threatens jus-

10. Peacebuilders need to consider the unique history of their region as they strive to build bridges. This is beyond the scope of this text.

11. “Mondialization” is another word that refers to this phenomenon but with a positive connotation, cf. World Council of Churches Justice, Peace, and Creation Team, *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE): A Background Document* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 1, note 1, <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/agape-new.pdf>.

12. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 53; cf. also Pope John Paul II: “Globalization must not be a new version of colonialism. It must respect the diversity of cultures, which, within the universal harmony of peoples, are life’s interpretive keys. In particular, it must not deprive the poor of what remains most precious to them, including their religious beliefs and practices.” In “Address of the Holy Father to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001), 27 April 2001, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010427_pc-social-sciences.html.

tice and peace in society. This happens, for example, when historical injustices and wounds are not recognized due to a biased retelling of history.

People who claim identities with exclusive privileges and access to power that simultaneously deny the humanity and rights of others attempt to create closed systems. This claim lays the foundation for fanaticism and extreme conflicts between people and groups. When cultural and political institutions are unable or unwilling to meet the needs of all people, protect the dignity of humanity, and care for creation, conflicts within and between cultures will arise.

Social media have added a completely new dimension to the way in which news is disseminated and accessed. While they offer fast and easy access to information around the world and enable increased awareness of issues and participation in the exchange of information, they also create the possibility of journalism that is not accountable, that manipulates, and that fosters uncritical acceptance and the expectation of immediate solutions to complex problems. Particular media bias toward conflict and division has become part of globalized cultures. Increased access to media outlets and social media can feed hate speech and exclusion.

With growing interdependence and immediacy of information, the awareness of the phenomenon of migration has substantially increased.¹³ The movement of migrants is often a result of the absence of peace. Migrants bring their skills and gifts, enriching their host communities; some, however, also bring their prejudices, divisions, and conflicts, making integration more difficult. Due to the influx of international migrants, most countries are becoming more multicultural, multi-ethnic, multireligious, and multilingual.

To sustain peace, it is vital that host communities protect, promote, and integrate migrants. In this way, people help to build a culture of inclusion and generosity. Migrants are often perceived as a threat to wealth and security, and are highly vulnerable to xenophobia, racism, and discrimination. Thus, the challenge before us is to foster a culture of respect for human dignity in every situation, in place of a culture of exclusion.

Overall, violent non-state actors such as terrorist groups or ethnic militias have significantly increased and with them, violence and war within societies and states. Too often, nations choose the way of violence and war

13. See the accompanying JWG study document *Migrants and Refugees: Ecumenical Challenges and Opportunities*.

as a response to conflict within and between cultures. Militarization, the arms trade, and nuclear proliferation are the most visible examples of such responses and constitute extreme threats to peace.

Religion

Some ideologies and institutions have at times appropriated and co-opted religious rhetoric to serve their own interests. This leads to tensions and violence under the false presumption of religious commitment. Sometimes, secular ideologies and institutions also seek to isolate or deny religious freedom. They may even argue that religion itself is problematic and that society would be better off without it. This exclusive approach in itself can lead to conflict and violence.

Although religions have contributed significantly to positive social change in accordance with their visions and values, such as those reflected in the Golden Rule of Christianity or the Eightfold Path of Buddhism, history has shown that adherents of religions have also helped to fuel conflicts. The core teachings and intentions of most religions are for the good of humanity and creation; nevertheless, they can be perverted and used to justify acts of violence. Virtually every major religious tradition has served as an inspiration for peacemakers, yet virtually every one has also at times allowed itself to be instrumentalized for acts of violence resulting in exclusion. Such violence can be seen, for example, in caste discrimination, and in majoritarian nationalism influenced by religion and culture. Some religious fundamentalists may believe themselves to be living in extraordinary times of crisis, danger, or apocalyptic doom. The manipulation of this sense of urgency can be used as justification for violence and even war. Such abuse is instigated by those who search for an accumulation of power through religion.

The instrumentalization of religion can occur in manifold ways, all of which have the potential to threaten peace. For example, such instrumentalization may

- encourage a sense of exclusive belonging to a privileged community that sometimes fosters prejudice, discrimination, and even violence against those who do not share membership in the same community;
- oversimplify and manipulate symbols, myths, and narratives;
- promote the sacralization of politics by using religious beliefs to seek political power and justify political conflict;

- denigrate other religions, and enable disrespect and desecration of any object, belief, goal, or action that is perceived as sacred by others;
- seek to proselytize (unethically convert), violating a comprehensive understanding of religious freedom and respect of conscience;
- provide the foundation for violent interaction between adherents of different religions or ideologies;
- impose religious rules and behaviour that are likely to provoke violence if another group perceives them as threatening.

All these examples are perversions of religion.

Dialogue

Communication and socialization are inherent to human beings. Consequently, dialogue is perceived as a positive process for resolving conflicts and building peace. Mutual respect, the willingness to both listen and speak, and sincerity are preconditions for dialogue. In conflict, all stakeholders need to be involved in the peacebuilding dialogue. If not all are invited or not all come as willing participants, dialogue will not achieve its intended goal and could possibly increase existing tensions. Dialogue can be a threat to peace if adequate time is not invested in building relationships and if it is not representative of all parties or becomes an encounter of privileged elites.

Whenever dialogue is conducted within authoritarian structures and with power-oriented attitudes, it is rendered ineffective. If honesty and transparency are lacking, dialogue can be manipulated for ulterior motives, leading to a breakdown of relationships and the exacerbation of conflict. This also is the case if dialogue is misused to defend the status quo of division and prevent the development of a new, shared narrative. Although dialogue requires the affirmation of one's identity, any claims of an exclusive identity can jeopardize peace. All dialogue partners must be open and willing to find common ground and shared interests.

3. What contributes to peacebuilding?

Culture

Each culture has resources to contribute to peace. Peace is sustained when different cultures respect each other. It is important to explore the manifold factors that promote a culture of peace and to analyze their complex entangle-

ments and interactions. These factors are: respect for life and human dignity, a sense of community, equality and inclusive participation, hospitality, the value of family, contemplation, simplicity and humility, care for the earth as our common home, a commitment to the common good, and the desire for reconciliation. If these values are to be maintained, they must be transmitted from one generation to the next.

Another important step toward a culture of peace is the globalization of solidarity. Solidarity is a key virtue. It can be defined as “a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*.”¹⁴ Peace is the fruit of solidarity.¹⁵ Therefore, it is important to reflect broadly on, and enhance, cultural resources that can promote peace, especially through education and the media. A culture of peace also depends on political and legal justice and their implementation, including safety in daily life, shelter, employment, and food security. It is essential to find ways in which globalization promotes these conditions.

There are many examples of faith-based peacebuilding initiatives. The following contemporary examples, among others, show how religions speak to the wider cultural context of peacebuilding:

- The World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, started by Pope John Paul II in 1986, has developed over the years into a clear signal to the world that it is necessary and possible to build solidarity between Christian religious leaders, leaders of other religions and representatives of non-believing groups. It offers a model and spiritual framework for creating one humanity united in peace. The Assisi experience has inspired followers of other religions, especially Buddhists, to promote peace through prayer, e.g., in the Religious Summit Meeting on Mount Hiei, Kyoto, Japan, that started in 1987.
- Since 2013 the WCC’s Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has promoted collaborative efforts among all people of goodwill to consider their own spiritual journey and “to join together with others in celebrating life and in concrete steps toward transforming injustices and violence.”¹⁶

14. See Pope John Paul II, *Compendium*, 192–196, with definition at 193.

15. See Manfred Rottländer, “Solidarity” in Nicholas Lossky et al., eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches 2002), 1057–58.

16. “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,” World Council of Churches website, at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/pilgrimage-justice-and-peace>.

- The Marrakesh Declaration (2016) marked a historic step in raising awareness for the globalization of solidarity in the Muslim world. More than 250 Muslim leaders affirmed that cooperation “must go beyond mutual tolerance and respect, to providing full protection for the rights and liberties to all religious groups in a civilized manner that eschews coercion, bias, and arrogance.”¹⁷
- The Abu Dhabi *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* (2019) is a landmark document for promoting peace. It was signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Al-Tayyib, and endorsed by other religious leaders.¹⁸ “It is a document that invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in *human fraternity* to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.”¹⁹

The goal of these and many other efforts is the globalization of solidarity between individuals, groups, cultures, religions, and societies. This globalization requires a capacity and an openness to learn from each other and to develop a deeper and more comprehensive personal and social solidarity. The context and horizon of the globalization of solidarity is the unity of humankind and all creation. Therefore, such efforts involve not only Christians, but people of other faiths— indeed, all people of goodwill.

17. “Executive Summary of the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities,” 27 January 2016, <http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/files/bismilah-2-eng.pdf>.

18. Pope Francis, *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html.

19. Pope Francis, *Document on Human Fraternity*, Introduction. Along similar lines, His All Holiness Bartholomeos, The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, addressed the Muslim Council of Elders’ Global Peace Conference in Cairo in 2017, stressing, “This is the biggest challenge for religions: to develop their own potentials of love, solidarity, and compassion. That is what humanity deeply expects from religion today.” In: His All Holiness Bartholomeos, “Religions and Peace,” Address of His-All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2017), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other-meetings/religions-and-peace-address-of-his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew>.

Moreover, critique and debate alone do not suffice to foster peacebuilding. It is essential for cultures to offer education on the values that will enable people to treat others as they themselves want to be treated. Mass media, provision of up-to-date and honest information, and programmes of formation all have a role to play in this educational process. People need to be made aware of best practices for building peace with justice. In this educational process it is important to reflect broadly on, and enhance, cultural resources that can promote peace.

Religion

Many religions aspire to a state of peace for society at large as well as for the individual. Some religions, such as Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, deeply believe in nonviolence toward all living beings, not only toward our fellow human beings. Gandhi, drawing on these religious sources, used the principle of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, in the long struggle for freedom from colonial rule. For him, *ahimsa* shared common ground with the Sermon on the Mount. The same principle of nonviolence that inspired Gandhi was invoked as a method of transformation by Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement in the USA. More recently, in Liberia, Leymah Roberta Gbowee was the organizer of an interfaith women's movement that contributed to the end of the civil war by nonviolent action.

To prepare themselves better for cooperation with people of other faiths and of goodwill, Christians need to be deeply rooted in their own tradition. This leads Christians to read their sacred scriptures with attentiveness to Jesus' teaching on peace and just relationships.²⁰ Understanding Jesus' ministry and message in the context of the Roman Empire informs the discipleship of Christians as peacebuilders.

The Beatitudes offer a Christian matrix of radically reordered relationships based on repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Matt. 5:1–12; Luke 6:20–26). Throughout his ministry Jesus was constantly breaking down

20. See Pope Paul VI, *Dei Verbum* (Vatican City: The Vatican, 1965), especially chapters V and VI, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html; and *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics*, Faith and Order Paper No. 182 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/a-treasure-in-earthen-vessels-an-instrument-for-an-ecumenical-reflection-on-hermeneutics>.

social barriers, for example, barriers with the Samaritans, the Canaanite woman, or the people who were deemed unclean.

Prior to his passion, Jesus said to his disciples: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (John 14:27). Although a peacemaker and healer, Jesus became a victim of violence, but he overcame the evil of hatred and the power of death on the cross and in the resurrection. The risen Christ affirmed this gift of peace through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 20:21–22). The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to continue Jesus’ ministry of healing and peacebuilding as a transformed and transforming community (cf. Acts 2ff.).

The Spirit has the power to disrupt all systems or conditions of oppression and violence, and to reconcile broken relationships. This movement in the Holy Spirit deepens intra-Christian relationships, and it equips Christians for solidarity and mutual accountability with people of other faiths.²¹ Christians must readily admit that they still need to *continue* to build peace among themselves while seeking to work for peace in the world. Reconciliation among Christians has been the primary concern of the ecumenical movement since its beginning. This also leads to common action with many others in society, strengthening the political will to build peace.

Despite deplorable violence in church history, there have been saints and communities that have lived faithfully according to the gospel. Their examples remind us of the cost of obedience and witness to the peace of Christ. Faithfulness to the cause of peace can lead to sacrifices. Today, there are Christian martyrs among peacebuilders. While not the only goal of discipleship, martyrdom is the most radical form of *martyria*, of witnessing to Christ.

Future generations face new challenges and possibilities for peacebuilding, for which they need to be equipped. Continuing education for peace must be a priority in every context. Peace education has the potential to overcome mutual ignorance and prejudices, to build bridges, to teach a truthful interpretation of the sacred books and of history, and thus to prevent vio-

21. See, for example, “Young Peacemakers, Christian and Muslim, Meet Religious Leaders during UK Forum,” 18 July 2018, World Council of Churches website, at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/young-peacemakers-christian-and-muslim-meet-religious-leaders-during-uk-forum>.

lence.²² The need to learn about others can be even more urgent and more difficult in places where there is a history of isolation or conflict.

The core message of Christianity includes repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, expressed in specific rituals. There is much to rediscover in liturgical traditions. These institutionalized forms allow groups and individuals to recognize evil and forms of behaviour that damage social cohesion. They offer a reliable framework for renewal, reconciled encounter, and mutual accountability. From the peacebuilding perspective, rituals can spiritually support and teach—for example, by

- marking the resolution to repent and change (*metanoia*);
- uprooting the causes of conflict;
- building bridges through dialogue;
- seeking justice and being a prophetic and healing voice for victims and survivors;
- being a healing voice toward the wrongdoers as well.

Dialogue

Dialogue is essential for peacebuilding and reconciliation. Dialogue, built on mutual respect and trust, always leads to deeper understanding and acceptance of one another. Through dialogue, people and communities of different religions living side by side have sought to build peaceful relations and to share their experience with others. The most important tasks of dialogue are to explore convergences and divergences, to overcome prejudices, to explain mutuality, to understand essential convictions and practices, and to define common tasks and goals on the basis of mutual respect and understanding.

At different levels of conflict, different strategies are needed. The healing of memories is important for healing the wounds of conflicts and nurturing reconciliation. It is also critical in preventing future conflicts. One of the ways in which the healing of memories can be achieved is through ecumenical dialogues that include repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, restitution, and restorative justice, so that the churches can walk into the

22. The JWG recommends for study: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and World Council of Churches, *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World: A Christian Perspective* (Vatican City: PCID; Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019), <https://www.pcinterreligious.org/education-for-peace-in-a-multi-religious-world>.

future together. New relationships can only be built through a dialogue that includes transformative action.

Friendship and hospitality at the level of individuals and communities play an important role in facilitating dialogue and promoting common action for peace. Processes leading to sustainable peace need the involvement of actors representing the different dimensions of life and society—social, economic, environmental, political, cultural, and religious—in a multi-stakeholder dialogue. Opportunities for dialogues for peacebuilding are to be seriously considered, independent of who the initiators or facilitators are.

Intra-Christian and interfaith dialogues have several dimensions: a dialogue of life, a dialogue of action, a dialogue of theological exchange, and a dialogue of religious experience.²³

There are situations and conditions that require a third party to initiate and facilitate a dialogue. Churches can be a catalyst or a host for bringing people together. They need to realize their convening power and are encouraged to facilitate this role even in minority situations. Churches have been involved in peace processes, publicly or confidentially, all over the world. It is an example of best practice that both the WCC (with consultative status) and the Holy See (as permanent observer) are represented at the United Nations.

The JWG is a body that uses dialogue and reflection when it meets. The study produced by the JWG on *The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue*²⁴ points to the basic dialogical dimension of human life and, indeed,

23. World Council of Churches, *Called to Dialogue: Interreligious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation: A Practical Guide* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016), 7, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/called-to-dialogue>; and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, “Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of The Gospel of Jesus Christ (1),” in *Dialogue and Proclamation* 42, 19 May 1991, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.

24. Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *Eighth Report* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 73–89, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/jwg-rcc-wcc/eight-report-of-the-joint-working-group>. See also Jeffrey Gros, Thomas F. Best, and Lorelei F. Fuchs, eds., *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998–2005*, Faith and Order Paper No. 204 (Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, USA/Cambridge, UK: Williams Eerdmans Publishing, 2008) 587–604.

of Christian faith in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Under its present mandate, the JWG is, on the one hand, expressing concern about increasing situations of conflict and violence in the world and, on the other, pointing to signs of hope.

There is no alternative to dialogue. Peace is a treasure for all.

4. What challenges for peacebuilding have been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

The world is experiencing new threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. International peace and security are seriously affected, and global public health faces unprecedented challenges. These challenges are increasing socio-economic inequality and discrimination while revealing political vulnerabilities and deepening the erosion of trust in public institutions. The crisis presents a degree of complexity that makes it vital to act and work in a synergistic and coordinated way, and to discover new forms of solidarity.

One important task of religious actors is to affirm the value of the human person and his or her wholeness in the face of stigmatization, isolation, and digitalization. The rise of poverty associated with the loss of jobs in the entire world due to the pandemic is generating the recrudescence of inequalities and injustice, including gender inequality, deepening the gaps between rich and poor, and affluent and less affluent societies. Furthermore, economic insecurity and concerns for public health represent major risk factors for the building and maintaining of peaceful relations between the members of communities.

Preventing conflicts, and healing those affected by conflicts, requires a new awareness of our interconnectedness. Even in their brokenness and fragility, each member of our human family has the potential to restart a process of reconciliation. Created in the image of the God of peace, every person bears a responsibility for preserving and promoting continuous mutual understanding in communities and striving for harmony and consensus. Christ's peace given to the world, the source of healing of conflicts at all levels, requires the human effort to participate in the transformation of the world into a faithful image of the kingdom of justice, compassion, and love, so that the world might see the presence of God among people.

In the context of the current multidimensional challenges, the most vulnerable are the conflict-affected and post-conflict countries. The sustained

contribution of faith actors and communities is crucial in preventing conflicts and mediating strife, and in the post-conflict rebuilding of peaceful coexistence. On different levels—social, ecumenical, and interreligious—these actors should link practical grassroots initiatives with global processes in fulfilling their call as peacemakers.

Peacebuilding recommendations from the JWG to the RCC and the WCC

Reflecting on the increasing number of conflicts in our world and the possibility that the pandemic might increase conflicts, we offer the following recommendations as the practical conclusions of our dialogue on peacebuilding.

The JWG is convinced that for peacebuilding all Christians ought to

- affirm together that working for peace is both their common Christian calling and their common journey;
- strengthen their shared commitment to peacebuilding through prophetic witness in the public sphere;
- advocate jointly for a biblical, holistic understanding of peace;
- acknowledge with humility that cultures and religions are affected by human brokenness;
- foster reconciliation through justice, repentance, forgiveness, mutual understanding, and the overcoming of prejudice;
- utilize together a century of official ecumenical dialogues between churches as a model for conflict resolution and the healing of memories;
- discover together approaches to peacebuilding in the spiritual and moral sources of other religions;
- delegitimize violence perpetrated in the name of religion;
- oppose fundamentalism, religious extremism, and inhuman globalization;
- collaborate with all actors— faith-based and civil-society organizations, NGOs, governments, and law enforcement organizations— that share the same goals and concerns.

Therefore, the JWG recommends that the WCC and the RCC promote and support the following actions at all levels.

At the international level, the RCC and the WCC should

- encourage episcopal conferences, councils of churches, and regional ecumenical organizations to establish goals and programmes of peacebuilding;
- update each other regularly about areas of crisis and the possibilities of common action;
- encourage joint peace education, which would include equipping their members to engage together in the work of peace and peacebuilding, for example, by disseminating the publication *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World: A Christian Perspective*²⁵;
- work theologically on moral and ethical formation that takes peace and justice as a hermeneutical lens for reading sacred texts;
- be open to involvement in the support and protection of peacemakers as risk-takers;
- promote simple and eco-friendly ways of life that temper the effects of consumerism;
- advocate together for durable diplomatic and political solutions in situations affected by conflicts and violence.

At the national and regional levels, the WCC and the RCC should encourage national councils of churches, bishops' conferences, and regional ecumenical organizations to

- identify and support the specific role of Christians as peacebuilders in the prevention and solution of conflicts;
- support the protection of peacemakers as risk-takers;
- advocate to bring the stories of victims and survivors, especially those of women and children, to the negotiating table so that the non-elites are listened to;
- address all dynamics of superiority and inferiority that affect peacebuilding processes;
- cooperate with all the actors of social and political life in elaborating durable and peaceful solutions;

25. A co-publication of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches (Vatican City: PCID; Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019).

- establish appropriate means for promoting peace—for instance, through the
- establishment of joint, permanent ecumenical peace commissions. Such commissions could act on the recommendations made in this document, as appropriate to their contexts and cultures. Their long-term goals could be: to prevent and de-escalate conflicts from the very beginning, and to work toward a restorative justice that reconciles victims and survivors, offenders, and members of the community with each other.

At the grassroots level, the RCC and the WCC should encourage congregations and parishes, and church-based educational institutions, in collaboration with local peacebuilding initiatives, to

- pray for peace, especially on occasions such as the World Day of Peace, and reflect and act to protect “our common home”;
- gather the stories of victims and survivors, especially those of women and children, to ensure they inform the peacebuilding process;
- enhance awareness of local peace processes, involving mass media and joint visits to the areas of conflict;
- promote advocacy together with local institutions;
- promote and encourage cultural and artistic initiatives that foster an environment of peace;
- help to establish channels of communication between key actors in conflict zones;
- develop initiatives to support vulnerable populations, especially women, children, and families, in situations of conflict and violence;
- offer safe spaces for truth telling and trauma healing;
- collaborate with educational institutions to provide materials that discourage violence and hatred, such as indicated in the publication *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World*.

Peacebuilding recommendations for meeting challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

Peacebuilders are in a unique position to forge pathways for trust, exchange of information, and collaboration, assessing systemic injustices

exacerbated by pandemics. Therefore, to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, the JWG additionally recommends the following strategies.

At the international level, the WCC and the RCC should

- make international communities more sensitive to the need for peace during the dire time of coping with the pandemic, for example, Pope Francis' repeated calls for a worldwide ceasefire²⁶;
- encourage social and medical solidarity, especially with those countries, communities, and ethnic groups most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, as a measure to prevent conflict at all levels;
- promote a language of peace and collaboration in the face of fragile hope and local tensions, and offer an alternative vision of integral human development, solidarity, and security.

At the national and regional levels, the RCC and the WCC should encourage national councils of churches, bishops' conferences, and regional ecumenical organizations to

- build church networks and support teams in which best practices are shared by trained volunteers who can build channels of assistance and support;
- collaborate with humanitarian NGOs and contribute to their social work by building joint support groups for countering the pandemic and for working for justice and peace;
- promote fact-based information on the virus to counter conspiracy theories.

26. See "Angelus: Pope Appeals for Global Ceasefire amid Covid Pandemic," 29 March 2020, *Vatican News*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/angelus-pope-appeals-for-global-ceasefire-amid-covid-pandemic.html>; "Pope: Implement Global Ceasefire Effectively and Promptly," 5 July 2020, *Vatican News*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-07/pope-implement-global-ceasefire-effectively-and-promptly.html>; "Pope Reiterates Appeal for Global Ceasefire, Calls for Peace in the Caucasus," 19 July 2020, *Vatican News*, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-07/pope-appeal-global-ceasefire-pandemic-violence-caucasus.html>.

At the grassroots level, the WCC and the RCC should encourage congregations and parishes, and church-based educational institutions, along with local peacebuilding initiatives, to

- organize church services and pastoral care in a manner that is conducive to coping with COVID-19 while at the same time doing justice to the spiritual needs of all the faithful and reducing possible tensions and frustrations;
- help counter fearful panic by sharing good practices and positive stories, with pastoral care for all afflicted.

Migrants and Refugees: Ecumenical Challenges and Opportunities

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matt 25:35)

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A letter to our readers

Dear reader,

Migration is an issue of serious concern in contemporary societies throughout the world. As you read this letter, thousands, often against their will, and at the risk of their lives, are on the move in search of survival or a better life for themselves and their families. Their already precarious condition has been recently aggravated by the unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had an immediate impact on the global community. The crisis has dramatically altered everyone's daily life and revealed false securities. It has impacted the whole human family, causing untold physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering, and the escalation of widespread fear, panic, injustice, disillusionment, instability. At the same time, it has revived the sense that we are a global community and that only by caring for each other and working together can we overcome any crisis, present or future. As Christians, we consider that this is a time for implementing new forms of solidarity with the most vulnerable members of our society.

For this reason, members of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches decided to focus on ecumenical cooperation in the context of migration. We are convinced that for the Christian churches, joining hands in caring for migrants is imperative for the witness to the gospel.

This text has three aims. The first is to offer biblical, theological, and practical reflections as references for discernment and action on the challenges of migration. This is necessary at a time when public debate about migrants is marked by prejudices, stereotypes, intolerance, and the misuse of religious identities.

The second aim is to identify opportunities for Christian communities to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate migrants. In the Old Testament and in Jesus' practice and teaching, compassion for the most vulnerable is a sign of faithfulness to God's covenant with the people whom God brought out of oppression in Egypt.

The third aim is to provide specific recommendations concerning ecumenical cooperation on migrant issues in the hope that by praying together, walking together, and working together on these issues, Christians from different churches will experience the blessings of strengthening their fellowship.

As co-moderators, we give thanks to God for the witness of Christians,

Christian communities, and people of other faiths or no faith who are already involved in the protection of migrants. We invite individual Christians, churches, and ecumenical groups to read and discuss this document and to consider the possibilities of undertaking and fostering ecumenical initiatives in response to the challenges and opportunities presented by migration. We pray and hope that this text will inspire you and other Christians to experience greater and more genuine communion in the practice of solidarity.

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2).

His Excellency Diarmuid Martin
Archbishop Emeritus of Dublin

His Eminence Nifon
Metropolitan and Archbishop
of Târgoviște

1. The signs we see

Thousands of refugees have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya people are fleeing from Myanmar to Bangladesh, thousands again are on the move from Central America to the North and are being pushed back at the borders of the USA, people from South Sudan seek refuge in Uganda, and millions are being displaced by war and violence in Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These and many more examples can be given where people are trying to escape violence and war, especially in the Middle East. Additionally, there are millions of internally displaced people in Ukraine, Iraq, Colombia, and Sudan. Forced migration is one of the most dehumanizing realities of our contemporary world. Yet, voluntary migration is not without risks, betrayed hopes, and disappointments. Many struggle to find the daily means for survival, families are separated, and young people are losing identity and hope. All this we lament.

Given their multiple and complex causes, current migration flows escape rigid and easy categorizations of any kind. Thus, the term “migrant” should be understood in a comprehensive way. It includes a varied range of categories of people such as migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, internally displaced people, and victims/survivors of human trafficking. This comprehensive definition of the term contributes to highlighting the fact that migration in the age of globalization has multiple and cross-cutting dimensions.

Recently, the already precarious situation of people on the move has significantly deteriorated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has sig-

nificantly impacted the life of the entire human family. In the face of this global crisis, migrants are more vulnerable than others due to personal, social, and situational factors. Restrictive measures introduced by civil authorities to flatten the curve of infections have greatly affected mobility and migration. Procedures for processing and providing assistance to asylum seekers have been slowed down, and several countries have closed their borders entirely to foreigners. The majority of migrants are in developing countries and living in overcrowded environments with limited or no access to medical care. Restrictions on movement and feelings of social isolation that are now also being experienced generally in societies worldwide provide an insight into the daily struggles faced by migrants around the world. All this we lament.

1.1 We lament:

- that people are often forced to migrate because of economic inequalities and exploitation; poverty; injustice; corruption; dictatorships; armed conflicts; religious, political, and ethnic persecutions; unfavourable climatic conditions; human trafficking; and self-serving politics.
- the social and economic disparities in the world, within and among regions, that expose how wealth is enjoyed by the few to the detriment of the many and ultimately how people are deprived of opportunities to lead fulfilling lives. These disparities contribute to the conditions that are causing migration globally.
- that in some developing countries the governmental and economic forces fail to address and even exacerbate the conditions that force people to seek a better life by migrating.
- the dehumanization that often characterizes migration. Vulnerable migrants are often exploited in countries of origin, transit, and arrival, particularly by criminal organizations. Women are often driven into exploitative relationships and dehumanizing employment. Young women and children are often trafficked and abused for economic profit.
- that the public perception of migrants is often misguided by toxic narratives, fears, and an over-emphasis on the need for protection and security. This impinges on how migrants are regarded by receiving societies, often resulting in indifference, suspicion, and rejection. Such negative attitudes are frequently translated by policymakers into

restrictive migration laws, closure of borders, or unjustified enforcement of practices that reject migrants.

- the misuse of religious identities and the exploitation of fear for political purposes. In many countries, growing discrimination, racism, and xenophobia have been anchored by political parties and movements in subtle, sometimes also open and violent, manifestations of ethnic or religious prejudices against migrants.
- the right to migrate internally and internationally has been deeply affected by the pandemic crisis to the point that some governments and public authorities use the pandemic crisis as an argument for limiting or blocking the right to migrate internally and internationally. They refuse due humanitarian assistance to people on the move in terms of ensuring dignified conditions of life, access to proper protection, and healthcare, in particular in the case of irregular migrants. Fake news, misinformation, and politicization of migration issues as a means of alienating migrants and refugees contributes to their stigmatization and to the dissemination of prejudices that tend to be pervasive in times of uncertainty and anxiety. Such tendencies can also entail long-term consequences for migrants' integration and social cohesion.

1.2 We affirm

- that, as societies become increasingly pluralistic, forums for intercultural dialogue between migrants and receiving communities have been created in many contexts, in which mutual understanding and respect can grow. Fear and prejudice are best addressed and overcome by coming together, so that people can become acquainted, learn about one another, and share their stories.
- that migration is an occasion for deeper encounters and exchange of life-affirming values and practices. Historically, migration has proved to be an opportunity for mutual enrichment and care. Migrants of all faiths can share their religious experiences and the richness of their traditions. Christian migrants can contribute, with their spirituality, to broaden the understanding of how the gospel is announced and lived out in receiving communities. In many countries, this has led to positive changes in the ecclesial landscape and in the way of being Christian communities in multicultural settings.

- that migration provides potential opportunities for education and capacity building. Reciprocal understanding and integration, with a view to full participation in the life of society, are fostered through formal and informal educational initiatives. Learning and capacity development also constitute a propitious avenue to building peace and addressing stereotyping.
- that migration offers an opportunity for nurturing relationships marked by mutual respect and learning, and for honouring the commitments of all those who are engaged in fostering value-based practices of listening to and caring for one another.
- that migrants contribute to the integral development of both receiving and home societies. Such contributions generate a new sense of belonging across national and ethnic borders. The acknowledgment and sharing of the diverse forms of cultural and religious wealth result in a real human enrichment by nurturing sentiments of fraternity and attitudes of mutual solidarity.
- that all initiatives addressing migration—ranging from forums of discussion to humanitarian assistance—be supported by a wide spectrum of institutional and civil society actors, churches, and religious communities, which serve the purpose of promoting solidarity, integration, and cohesion among all people as well as caring for the most vulnerable.
- that in the time of pandemic, all migrants should have access to response measures including health and social protection, regardless of their migratory status. All initiatives undertaken by civil authorities, as well as humanitarian and faith-based organizations, focusing on helping migrants during the pandemic are to be supported.
- that the worldwide pandemic constitutes a deep crisis in human relations in general that even exacerbates the new pastoral challenges and opportunities for our churches and for ecumenical relations, a crisis to which we are called to respond together. We encourage Christian communities and in particular local congregations to strengthen their cooperation in response to the COVID-19 crisis and to work together with other social actors toward recovery, social cohesion, peace, security, and development.

2. The vision we share

2.1 *Understanding migration*

Migration is an enduring feature of human history and is a particular sign of our times. The phenomenon brings to mind not only the idea of spatial mobility and displacement but—due to the interplay of cultural, political, social, and religious aspects—also implies the continuous redefinition of borders and identities. Although migration may be the result of a free choice, it is often driven by external circumstances.

Being a migrant is one of the deepest existential contemporary experiences, mirroring the ambivalences of modern societies. Migrants live in the existential tension between the past—represented by the life left behind in the country of origin, their family, their culture, and roots,—and the new future they intend to build in a different and unfamiliar place, one that can sometimes even be hostile. Positively, migration can indicate the reality of global mobility and the attainment of freedom. Negatively, it reveals the vulnerability people experience when they are exposed to conditions that compel them to seek protection and security outside their homeland.

2.2 *A faith perspective*

The signs we see move us to express before God our pain over loss, separation, and affliction as well as our hopes and prayers that these tears, sufferings, and injustices will not have the last word but that the God of life is at work through the Spirit, creating opportunities for encounter, dialogue, understanding, enrichment, and care, and leading all human beings—migrants and host communities—to a transformed life. Therefore, as people of faith, in continuity with the biblical tradition, we place both our laments and our affirmations before God.

For the people of God, migration has been an ambivalent journey between blessing and curse, an attainment of freedom and belonging as well as an experience of injustice and loss. The biblical narrative of the people of God starts with a “wandering Aramean” (Deut. 26:5, NRSV; cf. Gen. 12:1–2; Ps. 105; 106). The identity of Israel is built upon the remembrance and ethical consequences of their own migration experience (Lev. 19:33–34; 24:22). Resonating throughout the Old Testament is the commandment to defend orphans, widows, and foreigners. According to the prophets, the fidelity of the people to God’s covenant is shown in caring for foreigners and those in need.

Jesus—who was born in a manger (Luke 2:6–7) and forced to flee into Egypt (Matt. 2:13–15), where he was a foreigner—sums up and repeats in his own life the basic experience of God’s people in the Old Testament. Itinerancy and sojourning were essential features of Jesus’ life and ministry (Luke 9:58; Matt. 9:35).

The paschal mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the saving event of all humanity. Jesus dies for all humanity without reservation, condition, or difference. This both inspires and challenges us to open our hearts to the other without restriction. The Church, born out of Pentecost, in fulfilment of the paschal mystery, is a real encounter of people that leads the apostle Paul to declare, “In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” (Col. 3:11). Following this example opens the doors of our hearts to the Holy Trinity, which is the model of undivided and unreserved love and charity toward the other.

Biblical narratives of migration help to shape vividly the understanding that all people are strangers and sojourners, who have no enduring city but are looking for the city that is to come (Heb. 13:14). Being a pilgrim people is therefore a mark of the Church. The Church’s itinerancy is instrumental to fulfilling its mission to witness to God’s lasting love for the world. It is also a call for unity: inviting all people of faith and goodwill to discover that no social boundaries, political status, or national identity can supersede the shared longing for justice and the belonging to the one human family for whom God cares eternally.¹

The complexity of the phenomenon of migration requires an all-embracing attention and care at all levels by all people; Christians in particular are called to offer a common vision based on the values of the kingdom of God as expressed in the Bible. From a Christian perspective, migration has to be viewed from the perspective of an ever-present God, intervening in human history with signs of continuous love and compassion; in this sense, migration touches the inner core of Christian self-understanding and tradition.

All men and women are created in God’s image, yet each is unique and unrepeatable: “So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of

1. See PCJP, *Compendium*, 428–430; Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 101–102; World Council of Churches, *The “Other” Is My Neighbour: Developing an Ecumenical Response to Migration* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 20–21.

God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). Their uniqueness is tangibly manifested in their consciousness and freedom, which constitute the very ground of their human dignity. Such dignity is inviolable, and its integral promotion represents the paramount value of every political, economic, social, scientific, and cultural exercise. Human beings can never be a “means” to reach a “goal” that is different from their personal and integral fulfilment. Any attempt to dim their divine image or violate their consciousness and freedom is evil.²

By stating this, churches recognize and honour the dignity of all migrants, regardless of their religious affiliation, in order to foster the values of the Kingdom of God on this earth as well as to give an effective witness to the world as Christians, members of the one body of Christ, who has reconciled all human beings to God.

In the face of the migrant reality, the mission of the Church is necessarily love, mercy, and charity. God’s mercy gives rise to joyful gratitude for the hope that opens up before us in the mystery of our redemption by Christ’s blood. Mercy nourishes and strengthens solidarity toward others as a necessary response to God’s gracious love, which “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). All of us are responsible for our neighbour: we are keepers of our brothers and sisters no matter where they live.

3. The principles we uphold

This Christian vision informs attitudes, principles, and values of consideration and care for those who are vulnerable due to migration. At the same time, it provides opportunities for common engagement to transform unjust structures and to advocate for rights while growing in our personal journey toward the conformation of our lives to Christ. Our common attempt to read the signs of the times in an age of migration means keeping this memory alive and translating it into the life and witness of the Church through principles that we uphold and actions that we promote.

We offer these principles to Christian communities for reflection and discernment at all levels. They may be helpful to give direction for analysis and action in response to the opportunities and challenges of migration.

2. See PCJP, *Compendium*, 132–134; WCC, *The “Other,”* 8–11; “Theological Consultation on Affirming Human Dignity, Rights of Peoples and the Integrity of Creation: Aide Memoire,” 1 June 2005, World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order, at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/affirming-human-dignity-rights-of-peoples-and-the-integrity-of-creation-rwanda-2004>.

3.1 Sanctity of life

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). The sanctity of human life, grounded in such a mysterious indwelling, implies that life should be valued, defended, and cared for in all its forms, from its beginning to its end.³

3.2 Human dignity and human rights

“God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34). All human beings are made in God’s image and likeness, and their dignity is equal. Therefore, as Christians, we are called to uphold human rights as universal, inviolable, and inalienable. Guaranteeing the human rights of migrants requires their full integration into the receiving societies. Such integration is a two-way process that envisages mutual respect for the human dignity of newcomers and hosting communities alike. Therefore, both are invited to be responsible for the integral human development of all of society and all people.

3.3 Universal destination of goods and care for creation

“Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food” (Gen 1:29). God the Creator gave all the goods of the earth to the whole of humanity for the sustenance of all its members, without exclusion or exception. Such universal destination of the world’s goods grounds the right of all human beings to have access to the goods that are deemed necessary for their integral development. The actual exercise of these rights demands that everyone undertake to care for all of creation, now and for future generations.

3.4 Common good and distributive justice

“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44–45). The concept of the common good invokes a set of conditions that allow the members of a society to achieve their integral fulfilment both as individuals and as a group. Access to the common good should be regulated by distributive justice, which assures to each one what justly belongs

3. See John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 2; “WCC’s Intervention at the UN World Conference on Population and Development,” 5–13 September 1994, World Council of Churches.

to them, aiming at overcoming inequalities. The application of this principle to wider human groups and the whole of humanity constitutes the ground for social and global justice. Thus, migration might become a matter of choice where individuals are migrating for reasons other than war or violence.

3.5 Welcoming Christ in the newcomer

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt. 25:35). Welcoming the stranger is much more than a duty. In the newcomer, a Christian sees not simply a neighbour. Every stranger knocking at the door offers an opportunity to meet Jesus Christ himself, asking us to show our love for God through love for our neighbour: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did to me” (Matt. 25:04). By loving and serving the “other,” we encounter God, the “totally Other.”

4. The actions we take

In response to the signs we see, inspired by the vision we share, and guided by the principles we uphold, as Christians we recognize our specific responsibility to ensure that migrants are welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated.⁴ We are aware that the phenomenon of migration links practically every part of the world, involving the political community, civil society, and faith-based communities. The challenges posed by this phenomenon demand a coordinated, effective, and immediate response by the churches, societies, and states as well as the international community.

4.1 Welcoming

A prophetic concern

We observe with concern the radicalization of the debate on reception and integration, between acceptance and refusal, solidarity and closed borders, political negotiations and military interventions, immediate support and repatriation. “Welcoming” means enlarging the size of our tent (cf. Is. 54:2), accepting and showing genuine interest in the person. Integral to that welcome is the inclusion of people from different economic backgrounds, ethnic groups, gender, nationalities, generations, and abilities. Unjustified exclusions

4. Cf. Pope Francis, “Message for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018), 14 January 2018.

created throughout human history need to be healed. Welcoming fulfils the prophetic dimension of the nature and mission of the Church, called to be a sign of the unity between God and humankind.⁵

We recommend

- that concrete actions be taken to offer migrants broader options to enter destinations safely and legally (i.e., regular pathways for safe and voluntary migration and resettlement; community sponsorship programmes; humanitarian corridors; family reunification programmes; student visas). Arbitrary or collective expulsion of migrants must be proscribed, and the principle of non-refoulement⁶ should always be upheld.⁷
- that churches prepare the receiving communities and promote an attitude of welcoming, solidarity, and charity.
- that care be taken to cultivate attitudes of listening, understanding, recognizing, and respecting the socio-cultural diversity of others, promoting cultural and religious dialogue with patience and respect, and finding adequate means to speak to the fears and despair that are shared by migrants and residents, as well as those that distinguish them.⁸
- that churches offer migrants decent and appropriate shelter, with the assurance of basic daily services and access to health systems without discrimination until they are either helped to settle in the host country or to return to their native lands on their own, as they desire.

5. Pope Paul VI, *Lumen gentium* (Vatican City: The Vatican, 1964) §1; *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 213 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), §25-27, at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>.

6. The principle of non-refoulement is a principle of international law that guarantees that no one be returned to a country where he [she] would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm on account of his [her] race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (cf. 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 33 §1, at: <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>).

7. “Responding to Refugees and Migrants: Twenty Pastoral Action Points,” Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, §2, <https://migrants-refugees.va/20-action-points-migrants/>.

8. See World Council of Churches et al., “Have No Fear,” 20 June 2016, at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/have-no-fear>.

- that churches provide safe spaces and opportunities to hear migrants' stories and narratives. These can be life-giving spaces of truth telling, healing relationships, and reconciliation processes.
- that small-scale programmes of welcome and reception offered by national governments and international organizations be implemented as well, in several contexts they have proved to be much more favourable to promoting better personal encounter and greater quality of service and success.⁹

In response to the spirit of welcoming and hospitality extended by hosting communities, migrants are called to respect the receiving communities by way of understanding their traditions, cultures, laws, and religious life. Local Christian communities are in a favourable position to promote and facilitate such an attitude.

4.2 Protecting

A prophetic concern

We observe with concern that migrants are often exposed to exploitation, abuse, and violence. Human trafficking thrives on unsafe passages of transit. Separation of families in transition often paves the way for violence against young girls and women. Protecting migrants means saving their lives, defending their rights and dignity, and ensuring their fundamental freedom regardless of their legal status. In the face of the challenges of contemporary migration, the prophetic task of churches includes advocating for better protection of those most vulnerable and empowering them to speak up against human rights violations, and monitoring and assessing the fairness and moral consistency of public policies and legal practices.

We recommend

- that churches engage in providing migrants with education—in particular, language education—and resources to enable them to defend their rights.
- that churches launch advocacy campaigns in favour of migrants' rights and dignity in partnership with institutions, academia, media, the private sector, and civil society actors.

9. Cf. Pope Francis, "Address to the Participants in the International Forum on Migration and Peace" (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2017), 21 February 2017.

- that churches offer migrants—especially those who cannot easily approach proper legal structures due to their particular circumstances—legal assistance regardless of their legal status and advocate for the adoption of clear and relevant juridical instruments, both national and international, against all forms of injustices and criminal activity targeting migrants.
- that churches advocate for a more balanced sharing of responsibilities among countries in terms of assistance, relocation, resettlement, and family reunification, acknowledging the need for special protection of refugees and forcibly displaced persons.

Migrants also are called to cooperate actively in the protection of the most vulnerable in the receiving societies and to become neighbours to all those who are suffering and in need.

4.3 Promoting

A prophetic concern

We observe that, besides welcoming and protecting, there is the need to promote the integral human development of migrants during the process of integration. Promoting means making all necessary efforts to ensure their empowerment to achieve their potential as human beings in all dimensions. It is a process that leads to the vitality and health of the whole community as it involves everyone taking responsibility for building a healthy and peaceful society. It requires everyone to promote social interaction and cooperation with people of different backgrounds and to be good neighbours at home, at church, at work, and at school. The prophetic task of the churches in this regard is to highlight the potential for common development that can be unleashed through the encounter of people—migrants and locals—providing spaces and opportunities for the authentic expression and sharing of each one's identity and richness. Since we recognize that the relational dimension is foundational in our existence, we affirm that the other's growth results in our own growth.

We recommend

that churches create conducive environments so that migrants are provided with every opportunity to achieve their integral development. This implies ensuring equal access to healthcare, education, work, and justice and religious services as well as the enhancement of migrants' choices and the opportunity to pursue their legitimate aspirations.

- that churches proactively nurture cohesive and peaceful communities by organizing capacity-building and awareness-raising seminars, study groups, retreats, and other initiatives as well as by holding multicultural celebrations and festivals that bring people together in joyful mutual sharing.
- Migrants are also called to exercise their best capacities and energies for the integral development of all, contributing to the common good of the receiving societies. Finally, they are encouraged to develop creative ways of assisting and benefitting their communities of origin.

4.4 Integrating

A prophetic concern

We observe with concern growing attitudes of intolerance, indifference, discrimination, xenophobia, hate speech, and racism. There is a need to create and foster integrated communities whose ultimate manifestation is a peaceful, just, and sustainable society.

Integration—which is not the same as assimilation—is an intentional and constant process involving mutual learning, understanding, and appreciation of every person’s socio-cultural and religious identity. This meeting of cultures demands patience, awareness, overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, and trustful dialogue of life and faith. Churches are encouraged to sustain dialogue with those inside and outside of the Church who reject migrants in their communities, never compromising the value of human dignity. The prophetic task of the Church is to stand as a sign of communion and unity, fulfilling God’s design of making all one and recapitulating all things in Christ (cf. John 17:21; Eph. 1:10).

We recommend

- that churches make integration a priority by educating their members and communities, and by allocating resources for specialized training and equipping of church leaders and members for this task. The establishment of a dedicated office or department within the church might be a useful tool in achieving this objective.
- that churches advocate for employment opportunities and assist migrants in accessing employment services.
- that churches assist migrants and receiving communities in the process of integration, seeking harmony and cohesion while upholding

their cultural and religious values. This kind of assistance will promote full integration of migrants in hosting communities, thereby minimalizing exclusion and ghettoization.

- that churches include migrants in conflict resolution, peacebuilding processes, and mediation to support reconciliation in home and host communities.

Migrants are also called to assume conscientiously their obligations in reference to the receiving community, respecting its dignity and identity as well as preserving its material, cultural, and religious heritage; obeying and abiding by national and territorial laws; and contributing to the common good.

5. Churches working together

5.1 Consolidating ecumenical assistance

We acknowledge and rejoice that, in different parts of the world, churches are involved in fruitful ecumenical cooperation assisting migrants. In particular we celebrate the enriching contribution made by migrant churches, itinerant and diaspora communities, to ecumenical encounter, and to the life of the local churches and societies. We recognize our call to strengthen ecumenical cooperation as a way to:

- serve the credibility of the witness of Christian faith and vision;
- strengthen the effectiveness and the scope of our action as churches;
- grow in fellowship toward visible unity as Christians.

5.2 The ways of cooperation

All recommendations under the four headings—welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating—should be undertaken ecumenically as much as possible. Moreover, there are specific actions we recommend to episcopal conferences, councils of churches, and ecumenical organizations:

- invite Christian scholars and researchers to reflect jointly upon the elements adopted from other cultural and religious traditions present in society, particularly through migration experiences.
- articulate, together with migrant communities, the most appropriate specific pastoral approach, respecting the diversity of origin, culture, language, religious affiliation, and traditions.

- assist migrants in pursuing their right to celebrate their faith by offering them spaces and structures to conduct their religious services and to offer spiritual care.

Moreover, we encourage churches

- to be respectful toward migrants' religious and cultural identities, promoting their integral human development and assisting them to attend to their spiritual needs in a spirit of mutual dialogue and respect, avoiding at the same time misunderstandings and confusion when joint religious services or non-Christian religious services are held;
- to find appropriate ways of helping their communities to appreciate their own Christian identity and value systems based on faith in Jesus Christ while engaging in respectful and sincere dialogue with migrants of other faith traditions;
- to amplify best practices promoted by Christians such as first-stage assistance, resettlement or relocation programmes (humanitarian corridors), family reunification and integration programmes;
- to advocate together with public authorities and other actors of civilian life to elaborate and adopt durable solutions aimed at welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants, especially the most vulnerable;
- to denounce the situations where action, or lack of action, by social, economical, political, or governmental forces results in failure to address injustice toward migrants and to uphold their basic rights;
- to seek cooperation with other faith communities to provide spiritual and pastoral support for interreligious couples;
- to acknowledge and promote the right of every migrant to embrace a religion or belief in total freedom while avoiding any form of proselytism.

Responding to the challenges and opportunities of migration, we envision a future where the international community will recognize and promote solidarity, cooperation, and the equitable distribution of the earth's goods. This is essential to eliminating factors such as war, violence, and economic hardships that lead people, individually or collectively, to abandon their own natural and cultural environments. We hope and pray that in the future all

people may exercise the freedom to migrate in pursuit of better prospects or, alternatively, not to migrate and so to contribute to their country of origin.

Prayer

Merciful God, your Son born in a manger in Bethlehem was a refugee in Egypt. Just as you never abandoned your Son, so now be close to all your children in the world who are on the move in search of survival or a better life for themselves and their families. No one is a stranger to you, and no one is ever far from your loving care.

Teach us to recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your warm embrace.

In your loving-kindness, watch over refugees, migrant workers, those who are trafficked, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, and all those who have left their homes and endure fear, uncertainty, and humiliation searching for a place of safety and hope.

Protect them from any danger and bring them safely to a place of welcome. Banish fear, suspicion, and rejection from our hearts.

Give us eyes capable of seeing strangers coming to our countries not as a threat but as an opportunity for mutual growth and enrichment.

Banish selfishness from our hearts and inspire us with generosity while caring for those in need. Move us to share with them the gifts we have received from your hand, and may they share with us the gifts they bring.

Give migrants a thankful heart that they too may pursue peace and cooperate for good in their new homes. Inspire us to transform our cultures and our policies to uphold the dignity of all.

With the light of the Holy Spirit, inspire our churches to look for new forms of ecumenical cooperation in welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants.

Strengthen our Christian fellowship as we pray, walk, and work together for a world of justice and peace for all.

This we pray to you Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

TENTH REPORT

2014–2022

Study Documents

The title of the 10th Report—Walking, Praying and Working Together: An Ecumenical Pilgrimage—was the motto of Pope Francis’ visit to Geneva in June 2018. Undoubtedly this was the highlight of ecumenical cooperation between the WCC and the RCC during this mandate of the JWG. It accurately captured the WCC’s emphasis on a pilgrimage of justice and peace following the 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013 and Pope Francis’ conviction that unity can only grow through Christians walking together as fellow pilgrims in Christ’s love.

We offer the 10th Report and these two study documents to the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022 with recommendations for the parent bodies.

Together, these documents encourage intensive ecumenical cooperation of all Christians and people of goodwill, with a particular emphasis on the contributions that can be made by the WCC and the RCC together.

1. Peace Is a Treasure for All: An Ecumenical Reflection on Peacebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Violence

Without walking and acting together, especially in times of crisis and conflict, there is no peace nor authentic unity. Christians are called to be peacemakers, and “Christ is our peace” (Eph. 2:14). As peacebuilding efforts are not the legacy of Christians alone but are common to many religions and civil and nongovernmental organizations, Christians aim for all to work together for peace to heal the present broken world and the battered earth.

2. Migrants and Refugees: Ecumenical Challenges and Opportunities

Responding to the challenges and opportunities of migration, we envision a future where the international community will recognize and promote solidarity, cooperation, and the equitable distribution of the earth’s goods.

This is essential to eliminating war, violence, economic hardships and other factors that lead people, individually or collectively, to abandon their own natural and cultural environments. We hope and pray that in the future, all people may exercise the freedom to migrate in pursuit of better prospects or, alternatively, not to migrate and so to contribute to their country of origin.



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