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Report of the Programme Guidelines Committee

Introduction

1. The mandate of the Programme Guidelines Committee (PGC) is to propose programme guidelines for all further programmatic work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the areas of unity and mission, public witness and diakonia, and education and ecumenical formation including the six transversals: Relations with member churches, National Council of Churches and Regional Ecumenical Offices; Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement; Just Community of Women and Men; Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation; Spiritual Life; and Overcoming Racism, Racial Injustice and Xenophobia. The PGC is therefore charged with proposing relationship strategies in the areas of church and ecumenical development, with reviewing the programmatic work of the WCC, and with providing an integrated approach to the future direction and priorities in the three areas and strengthening relations with and between member churches, and more generally in the ecumenical movement.

2. The PGC received the following reports for its work:

- *Pilgrims on the Path of Peace: The Journey of the WCC from Busan to Karlsruhe;*
- *Pre-assembly Programme Evaluation Report;* and the *Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* series.

Sub-committees also considered the reports:

- *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace;*
- *Arusha Call to Discipleship; The Gift of Being - Called to Be a Church of All and for All;*
- *“Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action during Covid-19 and Beyond”;*
- *Who Do We Say That We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World;*
- *What Are the Churches Saying about The Church?;*
- *The church towards a common vision Faith and Order Paper No. 214;*
- *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for Creation; Conversations on the Pilgrim Way: Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality Resource Document;*
- *Ecumenical Indigenous People Network Reference Group and Working Group on Climate Change Joint Report;*
- *Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia resource document and addendum;*
- *Kairos for Creation: Confessing Hope for the Earth (Wuppertal Call);*
- *Strengthening Christian Commitment to Human Dignity and Human Rights;*
- *Xenophobia, Racism, and Populist Nationalism and the report of the Advisory Group on Overcoming Racism;*
- *Gender Justice Principles and final report of the Gender advisory Group;*

- *Churches' Commitment to Children: Churches Principles and Tools for Child-Friendly Churches;*
- *Ecumenical Global Health Strategy 2018-2021 and Health and Healing Commission;*
- *the Ecumenical Indigenous People Network Reference Group and Working Group on Climate Change Joint Report;*
- *the Economy of Life for All Now: An Ecumenical Action Plan for a NIFEA-Economic and Ecological Justice; and the*
- *Education and Ecumenical Formation (EEF) Commission report highlights.*

3. In addition, members of the PGC attended Ecumenical Conversations and Home Groups listening for emerging themes and priorities and brought inputs from plenaries and hearing sessions as well as contributions on specific issues which were received from constituencies including Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI), young participants, Indigenous Peoples, and participants from particular countries.

4. The affirmations and challenges in the reports of the Ecumenical Conversations are attached as an appendix to this report and will be used, along with all other contributions, as a resource in the next stage of discussions regarding programmatic priorities.

5. The PGC also reflected on the outcomes of the pre-assemblies of Just Community of Women and Men, Ecumenical Youth Gathering, Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network (EDAN), and Indigenous Peoples, as well as the pre-assembly of specialized ministries, which was held online in March 2022. The PGC is grateful for the important work of these pre-assemblies, as well as their outcomes and on-going work which will be important for future programmatic work.

Recommendations

- 1) The assembly **receives** with appreciation the report *Pilgrims on the Path of Peace: The Journey of the WCC from Busan to Karlsruhe* and the *Pre-assembly Program Evaluation Report*.
- 2) The assembly **receives** the affirmations and challenges of the Ecumenical Conversations and the messages of the pre-assemblies and **forwards** them to the central committee for further consideration and action.
- 3) The assembly **affirms** the recommendation from Indigenous Peoples calling upon the WCC and its member churches to encourage the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation processes that are based on restoring justice and healing relationships wherever genocides have occurred.
- 4) The assembly **affirms** the six transversals: Relations with member churches, National Council of Churches and Regional Ecumenical Offices, Youth engagement in the ecumenical movement, Just community of women and men, Interreligious dialogue and cooperation, Spiritual life, and Overcoming racism, racial injustice and xenophobia – which are identified for integrating the programmatic work and asks the central committee to consider adding disabilities ministries and climate change as the seventh and eighth transversals for the work.
- 5) The assembly **recommends** that the central committee examine the terminologies of the transversals.

A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

6. The *Pre-assembly Programme Evaluation Report* and *Pilgrims on the Path of Peace: The Journey of the WCC from Busan to Karlsruhe* both affirm the significance of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP) as a crucial strategic direction for the future work of the WCC. It is a powerful expression of “companionship”, and our common journey in and for God’s justice and peace. The report of the 2022 pre-assemblies of Youth, Indigenous People, Just Community of Women and Men, as well as Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network (EDAN)

additionally named the importance of seeking justice which can facilitate the attainment of healing, reconciliation, and peace.

7. This PJP includes the concerns for integrity of creation and the promotion of the economy of life. The PGC noted that companionship is an expression of visible unity characterized by “sharing bread with each other on the way” towards reconciliation. Through the PJP the WCC as a fellowship (re-) discovered the importance of witnessing together, accompanying one another, and reflecting theologically on our experiences. The PGC affirms the spirit of pilgrimage as inspiration for the work of member churches and for strengthening the fellowship. Relationship building must be at the heart of the fellowship, with “fewer texts and more encounters.”

8. The pre-assembly evaluation report identifies the five strategic objectives of the WCC Strategic Plan 2014-2017 which provide cohesion for the work of the WCC staff and partners. These have advised the work of the fellowship and guide the work in a way that invites collaboration from member churches and partners. The PGC proposes to combine objectives 1 and 4 with the addition of text, and amended objective 2.

Recommendations

- 6) The assembly **affirms** the model of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace as a continuing strategic, integrative direction and guideline for all programmes of the WCC and **asks** the central committee to consider how this model will continue as a part of the direction for the work of the fellowship.
- 7) The assembly **recommends** to the central committee the following strategic objectives: strengthening the fellowship and deepening solidarity and communion; witnessing together as transforming disciples; encouraging spirituality, reflection and formation; and innovative and inspiring communication.

Sharing the journey

9. The PJP provided a viable option for nurturing the relationship between the WCC and member churches. Yet, there is still a need to strengthen ways to connect the WCC to the churches in the regions. The importance of connection with the regions was discussed by PGC, with consideration given to having regional connection in each of the 8 WCC regions. The move to identify staff to provide regional connections is different than the model of regional desks which were a past model used by the fellowship. Regional connection would invite more collaboration with member churches by establishing a staff liaison for each region.

10. The PGC noted that there is a tendency for movements to become institutionalised, looking more inward and becoming ‘stuck’. Being an institution brings opportunities, and we need to reflect on when more flexibility and more de-centralisation within the WCC might be better for connecting the work of the WCC with the regions and for strengthening the fellowship which is a priority. Subsidiarity is an appropriate principle – do whatever you can as close to the ground as possible.

Recommendation

- 8) The assembly **asks** the central committee to maintain and nurture strong relationships with the eight regions with a focus on communication with member churches, national councils of churches, regional ecumenical organizations and with the additional intention of strengthening communication with ecumenical officers, ecumenical officers of the World Communions, and ecumenical representatives.

Integration of the programmatic work

11. An integrated approach to the work of the WCC is an on-going priority. This call for integration and collaboration must include all levels of the fellowship. The importance of collaboration and partnership with ecumenical regional offices, national councils of churches, local churches and ecumenical partners was expressed throughout the assembly and in the reports presented. Strengthening the relational nature of the programmatic work of the WCC is a part of the strategic plan.

12. The PGC received the report of the Acting General Secretary (AGS) and contemplated the areas of the report related to the work of education and ecumenical formation (EEF). The AGS recommended the programmatic work go from three to two areas, a plan which would place the work of EEF under unity and mission. The PGC wants to affirm the need for the EEF Commission and the work of ecumenical formation within the fellowship regardless of where that work is placed programmatically.

13. Commissions when appointed should have at least one joint meeting to develop programmatic priorities together, along with joint working groups. This joint effort should include opportunities for sharing information between the commissions so that all are aware of what resources are being produced and shared with member churches, national councils of churches, regional ecumenical organizations and other partners. Intentional programmatic integration should also include ways for the staff to employ models of working together collaboratively.

14. The voices of youth have been very strongly expressed and heard during the assembly, and we have heard in multiple conversation spaces the need for strengthening the youth voices and participation in leadership in the WCC and in defining the programmatic work of the WCC.

Recommendations

- 9) The assembly **requests** the next central committee decide on the way in how the programme areas are divided.
- 10) The assembly **recommends** that the next central committee establishes a Pilgrimage Reference Group which includes members of all commissions for the purpose of integrating and building on the theological reflections presented in *Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Companionship*.
- 11) The assembly **requests** the central committee to provide clear mandates and resources for all WCC commissions.
- 12) The assembly **affirms** the need to strengthen the Young People in the Ecumenical Movement Commission and ensure continued funding for this.

A Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity

15. The beginning of our work has relationship building at its heart, but we want to go even further and revive a sense that the fellowship is a movement, even a prophetic movement. We do not want to lose the sense that we are 'moving' and that we are on a journey of justice and peace, prepared to struggle for them. Deepened relationships should lead to radical change, to conversion, reconciliation, justice, and reparations. We affirm an ecumenism of the heart, but also an ecumenism of the feet in which we walk in the sandals of Jesus Christ.

16. The conceptual framework, theological framework and practical outworking of the 'pilgrimage' should be reviewed and re-examined to further develop the model of the PJP. Further, study of the impact of the PJP on member churches would strengthen the commitment to the model and its place in the life of the fellowship.

17. The PJP was an integral part of the work of the WCC and offered opportunities for staff, member churches, national councils of churches and regional ecumenical organizations to journey together, learning and addressing the challenges and opportunities present in the regions as we together visited the wounds. The intention to “move together” is still present in the fellowship as reflected in the theme of this 11th assembly: ***Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity***. We continue on this common journey together, celebrating the work of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in common witness on the ecumenical journey with the invitation of this assembly for movement toward reconciliation and unity.

Recommendations

- 13) The assembly ***invites*** member churches and ecumenical partners to commit to working together as a fellowship in “A Pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation and unity.”
- 14) The assembly ***affirms*** the above understanding of our future methodology in which programmatic work has a strong relational nature, and relational work strengthens the programmatic work.

Overview of Programmatic Work

Unity and Mission

18. The PGC was deeply concerned that the World Mission Conference held in Arusha was not highlighted in the document from *Pilgrims on the Path of Peace: The Journey of the WCC from Busan to Karlsruhe* as a major WCC event. We want to applaud the work of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), the success of the Arusha conference and the significance of the *Arusha Call to Discipleship*. This work is at the centre of all we do.

19. We heard the voices asking for more work on visible unity, and that there is fear (or critique) of some uses of the word unity. The WCC needs to respond to our core purpose of calling one another to visible unity, in ways that are in continuity with the work of the Faith and Order Commission in relation to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the responses to it and the work of broadening the table of conversation on the church. Commission on World Mission and Evangelism will continue its collaborative work with the Faith and Order Commission.

20. Many voices have been raised in our gathering naming the continuing legacies and impacts of the transatlantic slave trade and colonisation which drive the interrelated ecological, economic racial and gender injustices of today. Institutions and communities are caught in oppressive systems rooted in colonisation. African and African descendent people, Indigenous people, Dalits, other marginalized and racialized people, and the earth herself bear the trauma most and live always with its heaviest burden. These are systems many of our churches and mission societies developed and perpetuated and have not yet repaired, repented, or addressed reparations. To fully seek the unity and mission of the church, colonisation and systemic injustices must be addressed and our models of mission and unity framed to bring reparation and reconciliation.

21. We celebrate plans already in place for Nicaea2025, a series of events to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea including a world conference on Faith and Order. We look forward to strong collaboration between the Commission on Faith and Order and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism both in relation to this event and on plans for a world mission conference.

Recommendations

- 15) The assembly ***affirms*** the World Mission Conference held in Arusha in 2018, and the report, *Arusha Call to Discipleship*, and encourages holding a World Mission Conference in the years leading to the 12th assembly enabling the ecumenical movement to discern its missionary call.

- 16) The assembly *asks* the central committee to identify programmes which unmask and resist marginalising forces such as neo-colonialism, war and greed economies, xenophobia, religious and cultural justifications of injustice – with a view to reiterate WCC's solidarity with and accompaniment with those who are marginalized and excluded by the powers of our time.
- 17) The assembly *asks* that all WCC commissions be invited to provide models and methods for mission and unity that move the WCC to repair the damage, tend the wounds and begin to realise healing from the legacies of colonisation.

Public Witness and Diakonia

22. From this assembly we heard stories that confirmed that the call of the churches to witness together as WCC is connected to acting together in diakonia and advocacy. We affirm the role of the WCC to speak on the burning issues in the society and recognize the importance of the Commission of Churches in International Affairs (CCIA). WCC must continue to collaborate with other churches, ecumenical partners, people of other faiths, and people of good will, in its response to human rights violations. In a situation when member churches cannot speak for themselves, the fellowship has a moral obligation to use its prophetic voice to advocate for justice and peace in the international arena, holding governments accountable. The identification of priority countries is the role of the General Secretary as events change over time.

23. We heard the strong appeal of youth and others to save our planet from the disastrous effects of climate change for future generations and of Indigenous People suffering from the loss of biodiversity on their ancestral lands. We heard about the triple planetary crisis of climate, nature and pollution which threatens the continuation of life on earth. In this regard, we appreciate the feasibility of the work of Ecumenical Water Network and the food campaign especially in the context of pandemic and geopolitical conflict.

24. Churches are called to address the critical issue of racism, various forms of xenophobia, casteism, and all forms of discrimination, based on colour and social structure in the light of the deep hope to decolonize the ecumenical movement and its churches. The presence of forms of discrimination and the rise of nationalism and populism continue to deny the human rights, dignity, and freedom of marginalized communities. As churches bearing witness to the good news of the Gospel, we are called to bear witness to our own transformation and healing as we seek the healing and transformation of all of creation.

25. In the face of persecution and the light of Christ's love for all, we strengthen our commitment to promoting freedom of religion or belief for people of all faiths and none, as an integral part of the journey towards reconciliation.

26. We affirm the churches' ministry on health as an expression of Jesus' healing ministry. Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, the churches realize the importance of strengthening the churches' response to the growing global health crisis. The WCC presence at the United Nations should relate to and nurture partnership with the World Health Organization, together with ACT Alliance. With new trends and technology framing emerging issues in a rapidly changing world, churches need to be engaged in the ethical implications of enhancement and modifications of life and the environment. The field of bioethics continues to grow and raise both challenges and opportunities for all of creation. The churches must strengthen their ability to respond to HIV and AIDS, COVID-19 and all future pandemics, even as it strengthens its response and awareness of bioethics and theology.

27. The violation of human dignity is clearly visible in cases of forced migration, refugees, and the displacement of people for various reasons. The rights of the people to their land should be protected as a manifestation of human rights and dignity, along with the rights of stateless people.

28. From the reports of youth and Just Community of Women and Men, and within ecumenical conversations we continue to hear the violations of human rights and violence inflicted on sexual minorities, women, and children. We affirm the role of the WCC in creating safe and brave spaces to reflect on

controversial issues within and among the member churches. These spaces are needed as the fellowship continues to face challenges together as the one body of Christ.

Recommendations

- 18) The assembly **requests** the central committee to form a Commission on Climate Change and Sustainable Development.
- 19) The assembly **requests** the central committee to form a Reference Group on overcoming racism, various forms of xenophobia, casteism and all forms of discrimination.
- 20) The assembly **affirms** the formation of the Commission of the Churches on Health and Healing by the central committee in February and for approving its by-laws in June 2022.
- 21) The assembly **re-affirms** the importance of the presence of the WCC – together with ACT Alliance and the member churches – in responding to the needs and the protection of refugees, migrants, stateless people and internally displaced people and **asks** the central committee to form a Reference Group on Ecumenical Diakonia.
- 22) The assembly **requests** the central committee that the work of the Reference Group on Human Sexuality be continued, especially to facilitate the conversations regarding *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way: Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality* with member churches and ecumenical partners who are open to dialogue on this matter.
- 23) The assembly **requests** the central committee to form a Reference Group on Gender Justice with member churches and ecumenical partners who are open to dialogue on this matter.

Education and Ecumenical Formation

29. The PGC affirmed ecumenical education and formation including lay formation as vital for the whole people of God. Important methodologies for learning include the creation of safe spaces for active learning with opportunities for collaborative work with ecumenical partners who are also involved in education and ecumenical formation. The reports reviewed by the PGC identified ways in which education and ecumenical formation would be necessary for implementing goals and recommendations through theological education of clergy and scholars, or through supporting the ecumenical formation of member churches and local congregations with contextually relevant resources.

30. The PGC noted that no references to ecumenical theological education (ETE) were made in the Acting General Secretary's report. The work of ETE is an important contribution to the fellowship and the work of EEF. The group discussed the need to clearly define a mandate for EEF, its programmes and the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, with secured resources for the EEF Commission commensurate with other commissions of the WCC.

31. The relationship of ecumenical education and formation to all of the WCC transversals was noted. Every programmatic initiative should consider how ecumenical education can prepare its participants to contribute to the wider efficacy of the global ecumenical movement. EEF should continue including the transversals in all areas of its work as they are key elements of the body of work with the integrated work of the EEF commission providing opportunities for youth to interact globally in the context of major ecumenical events through GETI, EYG, etc. Continued support and development of the Regional Ecumenical Theological Institutes (RETIs) based on the GETI model will provide wider access to theological education and allow for contextually rooted and ecumenically oriented theological development. This will add additional WCC presence in the region, working with local and regional theologians.

32. Important theologies such as disability theology and Indigenous theologies can be supported by ensuring that the Bossey Ecumenical Institute has adequate resources to supplement their programmes and faculty

with scholars from around the world. The group felt strongly that resourcing EEF, ETE and the Bossey Ecumenical Institute are critical steps to ensure the strong foundation of ecumenical formation.

33. The pandemic has shown us that we can and must continue to adapt to digital technologies. Ensuring that the WCC has an infrastructure to help deliver ecumenical education and support gatherings of all kinds is essential. Hybrid programme offerings are no longer simply a way to endure COVID, they have become the way of the future. Younger generations are digitally native and will feel more at home with these technologies. The use of technology as appropriate can also enable us to minimize the carbon footprint related to in-person gatherings.

34. Use of technology and the rise of digital communication has been accompanied by challenges as well. Access is not equal for all, and at times, persons with disabilities and the poor are denied opportunities for full participation when digital platforms are inadequately vetted for use. While the WCC continues to explore the use of digital technology in its programmes and meetings, this must be done with full awareness of digital justice and inclusion of all persons. Globethic.net is currently being used as a virtual platform and collaborator on content, practice, and blended learning.

35. The WCC can continue to work with and leverage relationships with global partners to share in the work of ecumenical education. Across the member churches, the WCC should also encourage cooperation among theological institutions through the Network of Institutions of Higher Ecumenical Theological Education (NIHETE) which was conceived by the outgoing EEF Commission. The need for nurturing and mentoring women and other marginalized communities through networks like Pan African Women's Ecumenical Education Network (PAWEEN) and similar initiatives (e.g. among Indigenous women) was also affirmed.

Recommendations

- 24) The assembly **affirms** the Network of Institutions of Higher Ecumenical Theological Education (NIHETE) and the networking and collaboration it encourages among theological institutions.
- 25) The assembly **affirms** that the WCC continues to explore digital adaptation and resourcing for the necessary infrastructure to support educational programs for theological and congregational education on hybrid platforms.
- 26) The assembly **recommends** the WCC serves as a hub for resources like curricula, methodologies for the churches and theological institutions. This will require adequate resourcing.

Conclusion

36. The WCC has a vital role to play in resourcing and connecting the member churches. The commitment to the fellowship and to creating spaces for strengthening the fellowship even amidst challenging issues roots us in love and unity. The fellowship is itself a major resource as each member church has a variety of contextually created resources which could be shared with others in the fellowship. There is much that we can learn from each other as we continue this pilgrimage together guided by Christ's love which moves the world to reconciliation and unity.

37. A meeting between the moderators and rapporteurs of the assembly programme guidelines committee and the assembly finance committee was held to discuss mutual concerns, and to ensure alignment or complementarity in recommendations to the assembly. The assembly finance committee and the assembly programme guidelines committee welcomed this opportunity for its leadership to consult on matters in the process of the work.

Recommendations approved by consensus