

Report on the Ecumenical Conversations

at the WCC 11th Assembly
Karlsruhe, Germany 2022



World Council
of Churches

**REPORT ON THE ECUMENICAL
CONVERSATIONS AT THE
WCC 11TH ASSEMBLY**



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PREFACE

“Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity” was the theme of the WCC 11th Assembly, echoing the words of the apostle Paul, “The love of Christ urges us on” (2 Cor. 5:14). This inspired the Assembly Message, “A Call to Act Together,” as an affirmation of the common journey towards visible unity based on the call of Christ, “Come follow me!” (Mt. 28:11). Grounded in Christ’s love, the fellowship collectively affirmed:

We will find a strength to act from a unity founded in Christ’s love, for it enables us to learn the things that make for peace, to transform division into reconciliation, and to work for the healing of our living planet. Christ’s love will sustain all of us in the task of embracing everyone and overcoming exclusion. (*par. 10, 11th Assembly Message*)

WCC’s pursuit of visible Christian unity is most heightened during assemblies when the global fellowship of churches gathers to seek a deeper understanding of one another and to engage in dialogues that spur the fellowship to a common witness rooted in justice and peace. Since the 9th Assembly in Port Alegre, ecumenical conversations have created an opportunity for collective reflection.

The ecumenical conversations at the 11th Assembly brought together intergenerational voices because children’s and youth’s voices are important for their own future and that of generations to come; intercultural voices because all cultures provide hermeneutical lenses to enrich biblical and theological studies that shape our response; inter-confessional voices because churches speak and witness to the world together; interfaith voices, because our fragmented world needs all religious people of good will to work towards human solidarity.

During the 11th Assembly, the fellowship reflected and committed together that:

Amid all our diversity, we have relearned in our assembly that there is a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity to be undertaken together:

- Meeting together in Germany, we learn the cost of war and the possibility of reconciliation;
- Hearing the word of God together, we recognize our common calling;
- Listening and talking together, we become closer neighbours;
- Lamenting together, we open ourselves to each other’s pain and suffering;

- Working together, we consent to common action;
- Celebrating together, we delight in each other's joys and hopes;
- Praying together, we discover the richness of our traditions and the pain of our divisions. (*par.8, 11th Assembly Message*)

This compilation puts a resource into our hands that will continue the ecumenical conversation as churches and their interfaith partners move together on the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity in a fragmented world.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

INTRODUCTION TO THE ECUMENICAL CONVERSATIONS AT THE 11TH WCC ASSEMBLY

Ecumenical conversations are an important feature of WCC assemblies, as a space for delegates to share their experiences in addressing key concerns for the future of the work of churches for common witness and action. Through the ecumenical conversations, participants at an assembly discuss what it means to be church in the world, and they discern together the developments that polarize society and threaten the visible unity of the church.

Rooted in the assembly theme, the conversations addressed matters of faith, life, unity, mission, justice, peace, ecumenical formation, and interreligious dialogue, addressing them as conversations churches were having together out of common concern to deepen collaboration in addressing them. These conversations will continue to guide the WCC and the wider ecumenical movement beyond the assembly.

At the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, there were 23 ecumenical conversations addressing different issues pertinent to the unity of churches and their common witness and service to the world. This book is a collection of all 23 reports. It presents the deliberations and the ensuing affirmations and challenges that the participants saw as pertinent imperatives for the work of the WCC and the wider ecumenical movement within the framework of 2023-2030 strategic period until the 12th Assembly takes place. The report from each conversation contains an abstract, short notes on the proceedings, and a list of key affirmations and challenges to guide the fellowship in reflecting and acting on the issues identified. To ensure that the authentic voices of the conversation participants are represented, these reports were only lightly edited for internal consistency.

The Rationale of Ecumenical Conversations at the 11th Assembly

The horizon for the programmatic work of the WCC beyond the 11th Assembly will be shaped by pillars that promote visible Christian unity, justice, reconciliation, and mutual accountability. Discerning the future of WCC programmatic work, therefore, constituted three concentric circles that framed the ecumenical conversations at the 11th Assembly:

- First, *analyzing global forces* that will shape the future in light of fundamental Christian beliefs. These require time and deep/ening discourses on trends such as the human-induced ecological

transformation (Anthropocene), the neo-liberal economic agenda that has shaped the world, and the digital phase of globalization.

- Second, understanding *where churches are going* in light of the identified global transforming trends amid historical distrust requires trust within the fellowship—“stripping away the farce”—in order to work together today despite the hurts that still remain on the journey towards visible unity.
- Third, the search for *Christian unity in the context of trends in global history*, where divisions in the church often mirror division in the world, calls for a double-sided reflective account. On the one hand, churches must remain theologically grounded, while on the other, they must learn from the challenges brought on by global trends.

Taking seriously the Spirit’s leading in discerning the future, the ecumenical conversations emphasized the need for ongoing formation and an understanding of the ecumenical movement as a *movement* that must continue to learn in order to break new ground on pertinent issues.

Highlights from the ECs of the 11th Assembly

The conversations from Karlsruhe address diverse issues that are impossible to capture in summary. However, a closer look shows how these conversations address the themes of unity and mission, peace and reconciliation, and justice. To that extent, this compilation will inform and serve as a reference for the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity. The highlights below bear out this assertion.

Unity and Mission

The report of the first ecumenical conversation observes that to be true disciples freed from the burden of empire, we “begin by being personally transformed and become agents of transformation. Discipleship is inward and outward. We welcome the hard work of this discipleship. In the love we proclaim for one another we recommit, as disciples of Jesus, to his Way of justice, reconciliation, and unity.”¹

The conversation on trends and emerging issues echoes that the church is called to be an agent for “reconciliation and unity.”² This unity is not cheap unity. It is cognisant of the difficult conversation about negative colonial and missionary legacies that influence present, and must therefore be “decolonized” in future in theological “education, practices, and policies . . . towards accountability, justice, reconciliation, and unity.”³

1 EC 1 Mission Reimagined: Transforming Disciples Challenging Empire

2 EC 12 Trends and Emerging Issues in a Rapidly Changing World

3 EC 16 Together toward Racial Justice: Confronting and Dismantling the Enduring Legacy of

The unity we seek transcends unity among Christians, for in “Christian discipleship, we are called to partner with people of other religions and worldviews as God moves the world to reconciliation and unity.”⁴ In this understanding, unity is strengthened by ecumenical theological education that addresses “suffering, discrimination, and exclusion in order to foster reconciliation and unity.”⁵ Unity is fully realized when both women and men can meaningfully participate in the life of the church free from abuse. Unity is thereby the driving force and end goal of our common journey towards justice and reconciliation. This journey has three stations: at the first station, we celebrate the gifts; at the second, we visit the wounds and pains; and at the third, we act together for transformation of the injustices.

Justice

The ecumenical conversations highlight injustices we must “vigorously oppose,” such as “racism, patriarchy, gender injustice, economic exploitation, and the shaming of disabled bodies.”⁶ We do not reject the injustices in society only but also “acknowledge that in both the past and the present, the church has walked hand-in-hand with empire” or the “movements and worldviews opposed to the way of Christ and the requirements of justice.” As Christ’s followers, we must therefore vigorously “advance racial justice, gender justice, and inclusion of persons with disabilities. . . . Together we walk as agents of justice and truth and mercy and hope (as) the path of transforming discipleship.”⁷ As such, the ecumenical conversations affirm that evangelism “without justice is not authentic,”⁸ and that “Spiritual life and experience inform our witness for justice”⁹ in the context where the “relationship between social justice and evangelism is often unclear and seen as contradictory.” They, therefore, urge that deeper “notions of spirituality and their relationship to social justice” be further studied,¹⁰ understanding that justice is for the whole of creation.

As the “climate and water crisis is the result of systemic sin and structural injustices, which intersects with other profound crises,”¹¹ the ecumenical

Slavery and Colonialism in a Time of Increasing Populism and Xenophobia

4 EC 18 Interreligious Dialogue and Solidarity

5 EC 19 Theological Education – Why Its Ecumenicity Is Essential

6 EC 1

7 EC 1

8 EC 3 Walking Together Hand in Hand: Evangelism and Justice – Exploring Theology and Practice for Mission and Evangelism in an Unjust World

9 EC 4 The Gift of Being: A Church of All and for All – Inclusion and Full Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Ministry and Mission

10 EC3

11 EC 7 Creation Justice Now! Climate Action and Water for Life

conversations encourage the “theological institutions and member churches to include climate justice and water justice in their teaching and preaching.”¹²

Justice also includes health justice, as the report shows. The conversations, therefore, challenge churches to advocate for health “equity,” which addresses “issues such as access to treatment, diagnostics, or vaccines for all.”¹³ The churches are also called to “address stigmatization, discrimination, dignity, and justice for people living with diseases and different physical and mental abilities and for those at the margins.”¹⁴ Overall, it is a call for justice that speaks “to the intersection” “of migration, economic justice, climate justice, gender justice, and health justice.”¹⁵

Peace and Reconciliation

The reports also show the relationship between unity, justice, and peace and reconciliation through the “prophetic affirmation that ‘peace is the fruit of justice and law’” (Isaiah 32:17).¹⁶ The reports invite the church to be “proactive peace-makers who challenge a rush to conflict and offer an alternative to war,”¹⁷ with reference to specific contexts of conflict, such as Palestine and Israel, Ukraine and Russia, the Korean Peninsula, and many other such places that need not only peace but peace with justice. “The focus on the vision of just peace represents a fundamental shift in the theological and ethical approach to the issue of peace-making. . . . Instead of the static notion of peace as the absence of war or violent conflict, we re-appropriate an ecumenical reflection on the dynamic biblical understanding of peace as shalom, which expresses the interdependent relationship between justice and peace.” To that end, “WCC shall understand just peace as a spiritual challenge and continuously conduct a prayer movement for peace, where we can energize each other.”¹⁸ Therefore creating “spaces where conceptions of human dignity based on the human rights and faith orientations are deliberated on for building peace and common understanding”¹⁹ are imperative.

12 EC 7

13 EC 8 Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Cares?: The Churches’ Role in Health and Healing Today

14 EC 8

15 EC 10 Ecumenical Diakonia – Local and Global Faith Actors Building Back Better

16 EC 14 Ecumenical Call to Just Peace: Holistic Approaches to Peacebuilding

17 EC 1

18 EC 14 Ecumenical Call to Just Peace: Holistic Approaches to Peacebuilding

19 EC 21 Christian Ethics And Human Rights

Commendation

Reflecting on fragmentation in the world as a result of war and growing racial, ethnic, and nationalistic tensions, the ecumenical conversations emphasized the importance of centring marginality and the margins in order to shape an ecumenical theology, mission, and diakonia that brings to the fore the current self-understanding of the WCC.

We commend this record of the 11th Assembly ecumenical conversations as a resource that will continue to nurture WCC's programme work and that of the wider ecumenical movement towards manifesting Christ's love for the world in a fragmented world. We reiterate the invitation in the Unity Statement:

We affirm the vision of the WCC for the visible unity of all Christians, and we invite other Christians to share this vision with us. We also invite all people of faith and goodwill to trust, with us, that a different world, a world respectful of the living earth, a world in which everyone has daily bread and life in abundance, a decolonized world, a more loving, harmonious, just, and peaceful world, is possible... Moved by the Holy Spirit, compelled by a vision of unity, we journey on together, resolved to practise Christ's love, following his steps as his disciples, and carrying a torch for love in the world, trusting in the promise that Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity. (par. 26 11th Assembly Unity Statement)

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EC 1 MISSION REIMAGINED: TRANSFORMING DISCIPLES CHALLENGING EMPIRE

Description

Empire, whether seen in the nationalist empires of history, the neo-colonial and neo-fascist empires of our times, or at its worst, the church at points in history, promotes and prioritizes values contradictory to the way of Christ. The church, at its best, offers the ongoing act of witness in intercultural communities of faith that nurture transforming disciples, who participate fully in this broken world and hold out the hope of redemption, renewal, transformation, and ultimately resurrection. Faith is lived out in solidarity with one another, expressed as a reflection of God-created diversity, living our brokenness and proclaiming the hope in Jesus Christ of redemption and renewal. A redemption that is both personal and collective, local and global, seen in the community of faith now, and giving glimpses of the full reality of God's Kingdom that will be fully revealed in time. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has left many with questions about the direction of the human community and the nature of the human person. This ecumenical conversation will be attentive both to the human heart and to the big global issues. It will pursue a vision of transformation that can capture the imagination of a diverse church and world in the next generation.

Report of the proceedings

We live today in a multicultural reality; we must be intentional to become an intercultural church.

Christian discipleship gives us both personal vocation and community connection. The model is the indivisible Trinity and the modelling of love in relationship; that is the fundamental basis for discipleship. Our shared spiritual and moral imagination takes us beyond interdependence into transformation of the oikos, both personal and communal.

In the love we proclaim for one another, we commit to a Way of justice, reconciliation, and unity.

This Way involves vigorously opposing racial injustice; appreciating diversity as enriching and indeed God-given; taking an interest in others and identities that are unfamiliar; cultivating attitudes of openness (even in the face of a dominant or domineering majority); and developing reciprocal respect and hospitality, which often do not come easily.

This Way means equitable and balanced sharing of resources; making space for different languages and diverse cultural approaches; advocating the implementation of the rights and self-determination of indigenous

communities; letting go of our fearful clinging to familiar norms; and building deep reciprocity.

It means mustering

courage

imagination

and trust in one another's dreams

as we work together toward God's holy dream.

This is a pilgrimage to which God is calling us today.

Each of us is a precious child made in the image of God. We all have agency and are worthy. We walk in the Spirit of Christ. Whether our feet are motionless because of the physical uniqueness of our body; whether we walk in the determination of a justice rally; whether we nurse the wounds of neighbours who have fled persecution on foot; whether we fall; whether we hear the footfall of others in solidarity; the wounded feet of Christ walking beside us are reassurance that our lives and loves are the image of the Very God.

Both in the past and the present, we have also walked with empire despite having discerned empire around us as movements and worldviews opposed to the Way of Christ and the requirements of justice.

Too often, we have mistaken *imago Dei* for our own delusions. Too often, the church has been complicit in imperial domination and oppression rather than resisting it. Too often, the church has not simply been used as tools by empire but has collaborated and indeed colluded with patriarchy, capitalism, and the global market economy for the enjoyment of the few. Often our apologies are words on the surface but not radical repentance, amends, or reparations. We have allowed our greed to twist the words of Jesus that “the poor you will always have with you.”

As transforming disciples, we trust in Christian hope. This hope gives us courage that our repentance matters. We repent of: complicity with colonialism; racist attitudes and actions; practices of enslavement; dehumanizing the “other”; genocide, objectification, and fetishizing of indigenous peoples; unjust land distribution; collusion with caste systems; complacency about inequality; promotion of patriarchy and gender injustice; church leadership that props up oppressive political movements; forms of leadership that demean or extinguish persons and communities; theologies that reinforce empire.

Even as we own up to our complicity and cry our lament, our feet start to fit better in the sandals of Christ. We choose to answer the call to be agents of truth and mercy and hope.

We speak truth, recognizing that from the time of Pilate, standing for truth has been our challenge. We speak truth, knowing it condemns some of us to guilt and emancipates others to autonomy. We speak truth, leaning heavily on the grace of God.

Justice, reconciliation, and unity cannot happen without truth first.

With anguish, we map the truths: the massacres, the marched enslavement, the crushing of indigenous communities, the cowardly use of war, the silenced wails of those excluded on the grounds of gender and age, the insidious empire within us. With humility, we retrace the map with an engaged reconciliation that requires our best energies.

Disciples of Jesus today are called to listen. We are called to attend to what we hear and to remember for as long as it takes. We are called to discern when it is time for compassionate patience and when it is time for prophetic action. We are also called to openness to others; respect, appreciation, and self-determination for indigenous peoples; identification with the margins; solidarity with the oppressed; prophetic witness and the calling out of injustice; equity across genders; truth-telling and restorative justice; suffering for the sake of what is right; witnessing to the wounded Christ.

In the determination that we, the Church, will be a sign of peace, we must be vigilant and suspicious of empire. We peer through the smoke of bombs and the fog of anguish to glimpse the Holy Way. Listening, we hear the footfall of those who witness in their particular regions. Tying the laces of our sandals, we notice they bear the imprint of His foot, the One who goes before us through – not around – the suffering of the world. We take heart from the communion of saints, the departed and the living. We find faith in the wounded and saving Christ.

Our activism is rooted in discipleship. In solemn joy, we discover the fresh footprints of Christ on the path before us, and, in exuberance, we see that He beckons us forward to transform this beloved creation out of despair and into an intercultural community where none shall be afraid. We shall do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

Christ is our hope, and we lace our sandals with
courage
imagination
and trust in one another's dreams
for we work together toward God's holy dream.

This is a pilgrimage to which God is calling us today.

Affirmations

We are called by God to be a community of faith rooted in Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We seek, through our daily experience of faith and discipleship in the shadow of empire, to reflect and embody the Trinitarian God we serve. We offer this way of life to the world God loves.

We affirm that:

- We live today in a multicultural reality; we choose to be an intercultural church.
- We vigorously oppose racism, patriarchy, gender injustice, economic exploitation, and the shaming of disabled bodies.
- We respect and advocate self-determination for indigenous peoples.
- We rejoice in diversity as God-given. We are eager to learn about others and unfamiliar identities, rejecting the inequalities, ethnonationalism, polarization, and socio-economic imbalances growing around us.
- We now acknowledge that in both the past and the present, the church has walked hand-in-hand with empire. We constantly seek to discern and disown signs of empire around us: movements and worldviews opposed to the way of Christ and the requirements of justice.
- We begin by being personally transformed and become agents of transformation. Discipleship is inward and outward. We welcome the hard work of this discipleship. In the love we proclaim for one another, we recommit, as disciples of Jesus, to his Way of justice, reconciliation, and unity.

Challenges

In building intercultural discipleship, we call upon the imagination of a diverse church to minister in a diverse world; the WCC is challenged to:

- Vigorously advance racial justice, gender justice, and inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Commit to equitable sharing of resources, including technology and access to health care.
- Cultivate theologies of relatedness, listening to painful truths, being guided by communities that were harmed, and developing reciprocal respect and hospitality. We acknowledge the lasting scars from our woundedness.
- Seek forgiveness and then reconciliation with the indigenous communities whom we as church have hurt.
- Speak out about the genocide, objectification, and fetishizing of indigenous peoples; unjust land distribution; collusion with caste systems, and all abuse of power.
- Be proactive peace-makers who challenge a rush to conflict and offer an alternative to war.

Move forward with an attitude of humility and confidence in the wounded Christ. As we own up to our complicity and cry our lament, our feet start to fit better in the sandals of Christ. Together we walk as agents of justice and truth and mercy and hope. Such is the path of transforming discipleship.

EC 2 DREAMING A NEW FUTURE: A CALL FROM THE MARGINS

Description

The *Arusha Call to Transforming Discipleship* is a response “to Jesus’ call to follow him from the margins of our world (Luke 4:16-19).” It resonates with the affirmations that “Jesus Christ relates to and embraces those who are most marginalized in society, in order to confront and transform all that denies life” (TTL #37) and that “through struggles in and for life, marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God” (TTL.39).

This ecumenical conversation, thus, engages with the resources of the marginalized people and those accompanying them in order to discern the signposts for mission in the world today. Systemic marginalization of millions has increased rapidly around the world in recent times due to the global embrace of the market economy and the consequent shifts in social and political dynamics in favour of the powerful and privileged, the rise of right-wing politics and their exclusionary concepts of human community and tacit approval of structural injustice and inequalities, and the resurgence of racism and similar forms of domination and discrimination. The impact of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated this process of marginalization.

Affirmation 4 of the Arusha Call presents us with the charge “to joyfully engage in the ways of the Holy Spirit, who empowers people from the margins with the agency, in the search for justice and dignity” (Acts 1:8; 4:31). The call from the margins, therefore, is to join God at work on the margins of our unjust and exclusionary world to recreate one that ensures life with justice and dignity for all.

Report of the proceedings

Members of the Ecumenical Conversation 02 gathered for four days to engage in conversation about God’s call to mission with marginalized people in our communities and around the world with the mandate to accompany the marginalized, just as Jesus did, as they seek justice and dignity. We gathered in conversation guided by our very capable leadership and the exceptionally important work of seven small groups that eagerly engaged the topics for each day. Our conversations were guided by three objectives:

To inspire the imagination and the flourishing of hope for alternative visions of the future that is inclusive of all from the perspectives and voices of/ and on the margins.

- To read and interpret the signs of the times through the voices and perspectives of the margins discerning ongoing implications for mission, reconciliation, justice, and peace
- To identify new emerging issues for ecumenical vocation

Our conversations began with case studies/stories of marginalized people from various contexts around the globe that included sociocultural factors, supremacist religious assertions, political and economic policies that impact indigenous people, and environmental disasters such as those in the Pacific and Bangladesh. We shared unique stories of women, men, and children who have been marginalized because of racism, casteism, patriarchy, sexism, ableism, drought, intolerance, and hate. The stories highlight how various layers of marginalization can exist within a community. They also illustrate the intersectional nature of various types of marginalization. **We posit that a holistic analysis of marginalization requires a holistic response.**

The stories oscillated between imagining and discerning solutions for marginalized people. We sought to keep in mind their agency and ability to lead the WCC to solutions to the problems that we named and our commitment to accompany them as we work together for their liberation and movement from the margins to the centre as flourishing people.

Below are summaries of **Days 1-3**, followed by the prominent themes that emerged from the conversations.

Day 1

During our first session, we shared stories of marginalized people that included sexism/patriarchy in the form of denying ordination of women in the Church of Northern India, Roma people of Croatia who live unrooted in their history, the isolation of Indigenous People in Canada due to climate change, discriminatory policies that prohibit travel in Europe, and military powers in Fiji that relegates people to the margins of society.

Day 2

Our second session began with Eva Cristina Nielsen facilitating a conversation with Tiakala Jamir and Sara Gehlin. Sara asked, ‘What can bring change for marginalized who are not part of decision-making?’ What possibilities are there to change the silence? Tiakala’s statements included a suggestion to name the source of the marginalization/forces and an urge to move beyond assuming that those on the margins are incapable of doing anything about their situation and learning from them. Then she shared the story of a marginalized woman who rode from town to town on horseback with her baby strapped to her back. She became a missionary to the people. Sara spoke about changing the

ideology of people and offered an example of the Christian Council of Sweden, where there has been a spirituality of peace and an upswing of ecumenism.

Day 3

Our third session stressed that the call from the margins is also a challenge to the communities in the ‘centre’ to discern how the Spirit is at work among and through the marginalized and to listen to and affirm what those at the margins are saying. This session explored lessons learned by evaluating and assessing the practice and engagement of Mission from the Margins in the last eight years, highlighting opportunities and challenges, strengths, and limitations. Delegates engaged with and provided feedback on the “Reimagining Mission from the Margins” theological statement in light of their experiences and global megatrends such as COVID-19.

The **fourth session** was used to reflect to the group the themes and action points that emerged over the course of the three days.

From the discussions over the three days, these themes emerged:

- The importance of stories
- Intersectionality
- Transformative discipleship that gives account of hope through engagement
- Attending to the factors contributing to marginalization
- Real/not token participation of the margins
- Facilitate spaces for theologies/theological reflection

Affirmations

In the context of transformative discipleship

We *emphasize* the need for developing new methodologies for the praxis of engaging with those on/at margins to ensure that when these communities enter into dialogues from which they have historically been excluded, they are given full equity, full agency, and full partnership with ecclesial institutions and voice in formulations of missiology and perspectives on ecumenical formation.

We *recognize* and affirm the need that we must develop an international community of hope that prioritizes the following:

- Curating stories of transformation by sourcing and making available stories from marginalized communities that highlight these groups’ power to claim their God-given agency.
- A transformation hub/lab that actively supports the efforts of marginalized groups, their stories of empowerment, and how these can be applied and contextualized in various contexts.

- An intentional space where regions can be facilitated to share resources and their stories of marginalization, agency, and empowerment.

We *affirm* the work and analysis of marginalization and urge the need for ongoing, intentional interrogation of the sources of marginalization.

We *strongly recommend* that missions from the margins be a critical transversal within the programmatic work of WCC.

We *remind* the WCC to be self-critical and aware of the marginalization that exists within its structure: For example, the limited accessibility of those who speak a language other than the four official languages of the WCC and greater inclusion of those with disabilities. We do not want these individuals to be treated as anything less than full participants in WCC activities.

We *commend* and *strongly urge* the ongoing study of the document “Reimagining Mission from the Margins,” which emphasizes the concept and complexities of intersectionality and its implications to missiology and praxis.

Challenges

We *urge* the WCC not to marginalize the work of mission from the margins, specifically in terms of resource allocation.

We *encourage* member churches to deepen their engagement in the work of mission from the margins within their own regions.

EC 3 WALKING TOGETHER HAND IN HAND: EVANGELISM AND JUSTICE – EXPLORING THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE FOR MISSION AND EVANGELISM IN AN UNJUST WORLD

Description

Evangelism, as the invitation to transform the world with the hopeful, joyful message of the Good News we are called to share, unfortunately, more often than not, feels juxtaposed to the unjust world we live in. Justice, though a sine qua non-component of what the Good News is about, is far from a given. Through their discipleship, churches have not only a call but also a responsibility to work for the restoration of justice; to be in solidarity with/advocate for the oppressed, with the marginalized, with the “least” of every society that are conveniently kept under the radars of our comfort zones. However, this also necessitates an honest, uncomfortable self-critique, a self-valuation of our theologies and practices of mission today, on what they reflect, to what paradigm of mission these practices point, carrying out whose mission at the end of the day?

This Ecumenical conversation aspires to emphasize the importance and urgency for a kind of discipleship that strives for the transformation of the unjust world we live in! A transformation brought about as Christ’s Love shakes and moves the world! A transformation that comes/begins from within; from within the individual disciple; from within our theologies of mission, from within our evangelistic practices and from the challenges we face as we witness to Christ’s justice in a broken world, being broken ourselves.

Report of the proceedings

The following individuals presented to us: Mrs Jennifer Martin, (Caribbean & North America Council for Mission, United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands), expert, Rev. Dr Peter Cruchley, (Council for World Mission, United Reformed Church), expert, and H.E. Metropolitan Dr Iosif of Buenos Aires, Ecumenical Patriarchate, delegate. The objectives of this conversation were as follows:

- To encourage churches to revisit and, if need be, to recommit themselves to authentic ways of doing evangelism and living out transforming discipleship
- To develop strategies that strengthen and promote further common work on evangelism through mutual learning, mutual accountability, and solidarity in our common witness

- To reflect on the WCC's future work on transforming discipleship, grounded on Christ's love and justice

On Thursday, 1 September 2022, Mrs Jennifer Martin provided an expert presentation. She noted that:

“Christ's love” is a “motivating catalyst for mission and evangelism, visible throughout His ministry; speaking truth to power in the spirit of love.” To expound on this, we were reminded that:

1. The transformation of silence into language and action is an act that makes us visible.
2. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength – Audre Lorde.¹
3. It is our responsibility to make ourselves visible by calling upon those in authority to protect the least among us. Jesus showed us how.
4. Christ's love was visible throughout His ministry. He was very visible in speaking truth to power.
5. “Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’” (Matthew 25:44-45)
6. We, followers of Christ, must not allow injustice to befall the least (those in need) trouble/states of oppression among us.

On Friday, 2 September 2022, Rev. Dr Peter Cruchley provided an expert presentation. He offered a critical comparative historical analysis of two figures from the history of the London Missionary Society (LMS) – Robert Moffat and Brother Cupido – to explore what discipleship looks like when it is not dissident but complicit with the norms and desires of power, particularly white colonial power. Cruchley demonstrated how colonial thinking led to the ousting of Brother Cupido, a Khoi Christian man, in 1823, which exemplified a paradigmatic systemic sin at the heart of traditional mission models. Cruchley juxtaposed these two questions: “Why did you not love us?” – as those who have been the targets of mission ask – and “Why is the world unjust?” as those who suffer ask. He proposed an answer to these two questions: the world is unjust where love is wanting. Cruchley offered the “CWM Onesimus Covenant” as an alternative model for love and justice at the heart of Christian mission:

Repent for the silence in the face of the historic and continuing racist exploitation and enslavement of people

1 Audre Lorde (The Transformation of Silence Into Language And Action – short paper delivered at Chicago's Modern Language Association in 1977. <https://www.themarginalian.org/2016/05/20/audre-lorde-silence-visibility/>).

Make reparation to empower those people and communities sinned against through racism and enslavement
Reject the historic and endemic privileges afforded by racism and the legacies of colonization
Rebuild life-affirming relationships and communities which honour the interdependency of all creation
Challenge other institutions with compromising history like ours to deliver reparation, racial justice, and equity
Create communities which resist racism and enslavement, honouring the image of God in all people
Arise with those leading the work for reparation and system change’.

Cruchley called on the power systems, institutions, nations, and corporations that have grown out of the profits of enslavement to Restore! Release! Redeem! He noted that racism and slavery are sins that words and apologies are not enough to address. He noted that only change is enough, explaining that mission needs to leave behind colonial Christianity and be faithful to the Gospel as it provokes discipleship and confounds hegemonic power.

On Monday, 6 September 2022, H.E. Metropolitan Dr Iosif of Buenos Aires provided an expert presentation. He noted that from the perspective of the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church, the operational complex “*mission-evangelization-discipleship*,” in all its dimensions and implications, is the result of an intricate process set in motion by the Spirit. This tripartite core is necessarily spiritual and, at the same time, eminently intimate and personal. Thus, it must be completed and perfected – that is to say, “realized” as fulfilment in the coherent “relationship” of the person with God, self, neighbour, and natural creation within the framework of material eventuality.

His Eminence maintained that there is no possibility of proclaiming the Kingdom if one is not part of it. In other words, we cannot fully share the “Good News” if we have not suffered the very experience of the Apostles, who lived their personal experience with the Incarnate Logos and, subsequently, bore witness to Him through the energy of the Paraclete. Indeed, the system we are talking about is radical and entirely disruptive! Moreover, His Eminence noted that without *ascesis*, without spiritual exercise through the tools and means the various traditions of Christianity give us – namely, prayer (personal and communal), contemplation, meditation, fasting, abstinence, vigils, confession, merciful understanding, practice of the virtues and control of the passions, etc. – testimony, mission, evangelization, and discipleship remain at least incomplete, truncated, and limited.

In the same way, we see that the Church – the “Body” – is a “*sanatorium*” and not a court house, where the only one Who heals is Christ, the true Physician. Paradoxically, He heals through those who have been cured, those who are being cured, and those who wish to be cured. “Cure” here must be

understood as reparation, reconfiguration, re-establishment, and rebirth. Double and reverse healing, therapeutics, transformation: it is the divine uncreated energy – always one and at the same time multiple – that diversifies itself for all members of the “Body” to gradually become “Christ”: some on the cross, others in the tomb, others preaching, others healing, others performing miracles, others already glorified.

These inputs and the conversations that followed informed the ecumenical affirmations and challenges.

Affirmations

Seeing Christ in all people and the image of God in all – *imago dei* – allows each of us to know Christ and God’s image from within. As God is in all, the love of God is unlimited for all.

- Evangelism is a spiritual process that is intended to heal us on the inside while also healing those we encounter and the whole of creation.
- Evangelism begins as an inward and spiritual grace within us, grounded in experience (*ascesis*), reality, and often suffering. Evangelism moves outward toward mission and discipleship.
- The love of Christ is the catalyst for the just work of missions and evangelism.
- Evangelizing is being present – offering hope where there are injustices and expressing the love of Christ in those situations.
- Having heard the painful experiences of indigenous people at the hands of missionaries, we affirm that God loved and was in the lives of all people, all people reflected the image of God, and God was moving in God’s own way in the lives of all people before missionaries.
- Evangelism without justice is not authentic.
- We must accompany and empower those in need. Different experiences of suffering demand different approaches to mission, such that justice can be realized for all people equitably.
- We need to learn from those who are strangers to us, expecting to be changed through encounters and not to transform others into reflections of ourselves.
- Evangelism requires that we be prophetic. Speaking truth to power is about advocating for human dignity with Christ’s unconditional love, no matter the cost.
- Faith in Christ and his love empowers our testimony in the face of abusive power.

- It is right to witness to the love of Christ, but this should never be expressed through manipulation or coercion. Evangelism differs from proselytization in being motivated alone by the love of God.
- Spiritual life and experience inform our witness for justice.
- The stories and witness of marginalized peoples should be presented in their own voices. These stories should not be instrumentalized to lessen the responsibility of those individuals and cultures that have dominated.

Challenges

The group noted the following challenges:

- Colonialism and its legacies continue to negate human dignity.
- Work must be done for a continuous transformation of evangelism so that it no longer supports colonialism.
- Injustices resulting from evangelism require healing.
- Ideology and cultural supremacy always get in the way of evangelism rooted in love and built through relationships and common experience.
- The relationship between social justice and evangelism is often unclear and seen as contradictory. Deeper notions of spirituality and their relationship to social justice require further study.
- Literacy in one another's vocabulary within the ecumenical movement is needed.
- Suffering is a part of the human condition and of the Christian path.
- We must be careful not to model Christ according to our own image, ideas, and interests.

EC 4 THE GIFT OF BEING: A CHURCH OF ALL AND FOR ALL – INCLUSION AND FULL PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MINISTRY AND MISSION

Description

The title of the ecumenical conversation is borrowed from the theological reflection on disability, which was received and approved by the WCC Central Committee in 2016, entitled “The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and for All.” The conversation will look at the various layers of marginalization based on disability through a process of critical theological reflection on our ecclesial practices and will empower the churches how to find meaningful inclusion within religious communities. Discussions on our common vulnerability as the human race, especially in the context of the assembly theme, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Sustainable Development Goals, will be explored, as well as sharing experiences on the gift of life as an endowment in countless ways from others throughout our lifetime. From the conversation, the participants will get a deeper understanding of re-encountering God in the light of the experience of disability and a search for fresh understandings of what it means to live in the image of such a God.

Report of the proceedings:

Arnie Fritzon from Sweden was due to make a presentation but was unable to due to ill health. Therefore, Rev. John Naude, an Anglican Priest from the UK, made it on his behalf.

Gordon explained that this conversation was being hosted by EDAN. All the presenters are members of EDAN and have lived experience of disability. EDAN has been advocating for many years with the WCC in seeking to extend churches’ understanding of disability and for them to be more welcoming and inclusive to all. “A Church of All and For All,” the first document about including disabled people in our churches in 2003, was followed by a second document, “The Gift of Being,” in 2016. Both these publications were theological statements drafted by EDAN and made a huge impact on the theology in mainstream churches. “The Gift of Being” contained at its core the theological statement that the value of life is in its creation and that we are all made in the image of God. It also emphasized that it shouldn’t be disabled people arguing for inclusion, but it should be the church. It is in our very being that we bring something to God’s world and to his church.

People with disabilities use the phrase “nothing about us, without us.” As a church, we need to make sure that we are hearing the voice of people with

disabilities. This includes the most vulnerable and the most marginalized in our societies because we recognize that disabled people are the poorest of the poor. The Gift of Being recognizes that no matter how vulnerable we may be, it is through our vulnerability that God uses us (1 Cor 12). However, we need to bear in mind that a disabled person's vulnerability is not necessarily related to their disability but could be related to ill health associated with it. Therefore, it is their ill health that may need addressing and not their disability.

The church seems fixated on the need to see disabled people cured of their disability, whereas true healing is seen when disabled people are welcomed and participate within the church and our societies. We shouldn't think of disabled people as a homogenous group but rather as each individual being an expression of the human diversity created by God.

Rev. Helen Setyoputri has a son with Down syndrome, and in her presentation asked the question, "Do you think your church is welcoming to persons with disabilities?" She stated that, for her, it wasn't just about inclusion but more about the celebration of life. She gave many examples of what could be done to remove obstacles to enable full participation in our churches. This included sign language, and the use of Braille, pictures, and tactile materials to tell Bible stories. She demonstrated this by having people with disabilities in the pictures telling Bible stories. She explained that her suggestions were relatively easy steps that would move us from inclusion to belonging. It is not just about making space for people with disabilities but about making friends. The key is not to see a disability as a limitation but to find creative and innovative ways to engage everyone.

A common theme running through the feedback from the group work was the need to disseminate this information to all churches and the importance of advocating through our actions, not just our words. More time was wanted as it was helpful because it demonstrated practical resources that could be used and were multi-sensory.

Questions were also raised about how it is more convenient to consider disability as a sickness rather than churches taking responsibility for making the church a welcoming community.

The difference between healing and cure was also discussed. How curing focuses on physicality, and healing focuses on relationality, both individual and the community. Something that was also considered was the language of gift versus impairment.

The final theme discussed was the shift from inclusion to belonging and whether inclusion suggests the disabled person being the object, whereas, by belonging, they become the subject.

Rev. John Naude presented the first part of the conversation. John worked through the perceptions of disability that people have and how they sometimes come from a position of fear of disability and the belief that disability is a punishment from God or the result of being cursed. He illustrated this through

the story of Job and the disciples asking Jesus in John Chapter. 9 whether it was the blind man or his parents that had sinned.

John then explained that we have a biblical mandate to care for and enable others (Isaiah 1:17, Micah 6:8), and this includes people with disabilities. This is affirmed by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This document emphasizes the need to respect the inherent dignity and autonomy of people with disabilities, as well as not discriminating against them and enabling their full participation and inclusion in society. To fail to recognize that everyone is created in the image of God is a failure of our mandate from God.

Within every culture, people with disabilities are the poorest of the poor; they are often seen as the least valuable. The impact of COVID-19 has been disproportionate, but we are also affected by environmental, political, economic, or other crises. However, through the collaboration of different organizations, persons with disabilities can make a better world together. However, there is a shift occurring in people's perceptions, especially within the media, e.g., adverts about beauty products which depict people with disabilities and shown on television. The biggest change, however, has come through collectives like Black Civil Rights, Feminist Movements, PRIDE, and the Disability Movement. As disabled people, we are stronger together, but also, as Christians, we have the power of prayer, and it is integral to what we do, for we cannot say to anyone in the church, "We do not need you" (1 Cor 12).

In her presentation, Rev. Helen Setyoputri re-emphasized that it is not about inclusion for the sake of inclusion; everything we can do to adapt the environment creatively to include all God's children is about the love of Christ. In this way, we help to challenge our communities and raise awareness. She also spoke about people with invisible disabilities, especially mental health issues that have been magnified due to COVID, and how they also have to be included. Although we might do some public celebrations, for example, Disability Proud Month in July, or Down Syndrome Day, life needs to be celebrated every day and in every way.

Helen stressed the importance of teaching disability theology and teaching how to feel God's love in our every day; the way we feel God in our lives allows us to express our love of God and share our faith experiences. She suggested that we are called to embrace everyone, so we need to bring our accessible and adapted activities to our church pews and into our communities. Helen explained that as a parent of a child with a disability and a pastor, she understands how it feels to be limited by the system in her community. Parents of children with disabilities in her community often go to her as someone who walks a similar path. This was affirmed by a participant who spoke about her own lived experience and how her mother was instrumental in fighting the system and ensuring her full participation in her community.

Following the presentations, there was a discussion about whether different countries had ratified the CRPD or had legislation protecting the rights of disabled people. Some participants were unsure, and a few were certain that their country had signed the convention.

Another discussion was on the language we use when referring to people with disabilities. John explained that he preferred the term “dis-abled people” because he sees it as a political statement that he is dis-abled by society. Others prefer “people with disabilities” because it puts “people” first.

The final discussion was about how there are many strong examples in scripture of how to treat people with disabilities. It seems we have forgotten to read these texts. Part of the solution is coming from people with disabilities themselves, and faith communities must come together and celebrate those who are caregivers and disabled people themselves.

Rev. Mary Chipoka is a deaf pastor from Zimbabwe who communicates with sign language, and Samson interpreted the presentation.

Mary opened the session by saying that a disability-friendly church is driven by a mission and vision that is accessible to all people, regardless of disability. In a barrier-free church, there is maximum visibility of the grace of God extended to all through Jesus Christ. Her presentation highlighted some of the experiences of people with disabilities in different churches and suggested some intervention strategies.

She then expressed some of the barriers to inclusion for people with disabilities in churches. There are theological barriers where sign language interpreters have limited knowledge of the Bible and its characters, and this affects their interpretation. Also, the absence of interpreters may mean that deaf people can't attend church. Visual impaired people may also be unable to attend due to the absence of written material in Braille. Mary also mentioned the physical barriers encountered, e.g., the lack of ramps, which restrict access. An observation was that there is a lack of proportional representation of disabled people in leadership within churches. There is also a negative attitude towards disabled people due to the myths and misconceptions in some churches that disability is the result of evil spirits or a punishment from God, particularly those with intellectual disabilities.

Technological advancements like display screens, computers, and projectors can enhance the participation of people with disabilities, but these are expensive. Some church policies do not adhere to the UNCRPD policy document.

Some solutions suggested were the introduction of the sign language Bible, although an interpreter will still be needed for those who do not understand English. Also, training in basic sign language in different churches, making churches visually and physically accessible, and having access to all written material in Braille. Most importantly, there is a need for inclusive leadership in churches that adheres to “nothing for us without us.”

Following the presentation, participants were split into three groups to answer the following questions:

What adaptations should be made to our churches?

This group discussed that there are attitudinal barriers, as well as a need to adapt the liturgy to make it accessible. There is also a need to discover the preferred mode of communication of each person with a disability. In order to ensure their independence, they may require financial assistance.

What are the myths and misconceptions?

This group discussed that there is the misconception that people with disabilities don't understand what is going on and so why do we try to include them? Another misconception is that children and young people with autism may disrupt the service, so why include them? People may feel that persons with disabilities are easily upset and may become angry, so they worry about interacting with them. It may be considered that sign language is not considered a language. Also, that disabled people don't have anything to offer the church. It is important that disabled people are consulted when any building is being built or modified to make it accessible.

What is the role of the church in promoting the inclusion of disabled people?

This group discussed how the role of advocating for a church to be accessible in every way is a community responsibility, not just the church leader's. It is important to ask disabled people what they need and what gifts they bring to the church so that they can belong and not just be included. This needs to be looked at as not a concession that is made but as an identity that is affirmed. The church needs to distance itself from cultural misconceptions about disability and set an example to the rest of the community.

Affirmations

1. *The Gift of Being: A Church of All and for All* reflects and continues the ecumenical dialogue of persons with disabilities within the church, discussing a common vulnerability of humankind; there have been numerous reflections by the churches on its use. However, we urge more churches to use this document to reflect on the place of persons with disabilities in the church and society.
2. We are all created in the image of God, and this allows us to treat each and every person, with or without ability, with dignity.
3. We recognize that churches have continued to recognize the God-given gifts of persons with disabilities and are accepting those gifts for use in their churches.

4. Accessibility of physical structures has been improved in some of our churches which have embraced the Universal Design Building for Everyone guidelines in the construction of new churches.
5. Some churches have become partners in the advocacy for the ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and have included this in their sermons and liturgies.
6. Encourage more people persons with disabilities to be part and parcel of the liturgical, spiritual, social, economic, and development life of the church.

Challenges

1. Develop training guidelines and provide teaching materials to be used by member churches to help churches to be more accessible.
2. Make all WCC programs and activities more inclusive by having persons with disabilities in all programs and activities and at all levels.
3. Include disability theology courses in theological institutes' curriculums (such as Bossey) and offer formal training on how to include persons with disabilities.
4. Call upon the WCC to include disability in their budget and to resource EDAN to facilitate training and capacity building in various regions and across regions and national boundaries.
5. Urge member churches to acknowledge and minister to the full range of disabilities, including invisible and psychiatric disabilities.
6. Include persons with disabilities in the assessment process of all WCC policies and programs.
7. Call upon the WCC to prioritize the needs of refugees and migrants with disabilities in disaster planning and response.

EC 5 PRAYER IN CREATION

Description

One of the affirmations made in ecumenical conversation 05 at the 10th Assembly of the WCC in Busan was, “*Prayer is something we can already do together. We should pray together as often as possible.*” As we continue to address the issue of common prayer in the ecumenical movement in our ongoing pilgrimage towards unity and reconciliation, we must continue to affirm that our praying together is a spiritual gift.

This ecumenical conversation, through its experiential methodologies, will: (a) examine how creation, a gift that is shared by all, can be a source that informs both the content and contour of common prayer; (b) reflect on how elements of creation have already contributed to shaping Christian spirituality and theology throughout the centuries in various faith traditions, and (c) explore how expressions of common prayer, modelled on the shared gift of creation, can open new vistas for ecumenical prayer to be an opened door through which unity and reconciliation are approached as we welcome all believers in the Triune God to be joined together in common prayer.

Report of the proceedings

Objectives

1. To examine how creation, a gift that is shared by all, can inform both the content and contour of common prayer.
2. To reflect how elements of creation have already contributed to shaping Christian spirituality and theology throughout the centuries in various faith traditions.
3. To explore how expressions of common prayer, modelled on the shared gift of creation, can open new vistas for ecumenical prayer to be an open door through which unity and reconciliation are approached as we welcome all believers in the Triune God to be joined together in common prayer.

Expected Outcomes

Participants will:

1. Better appreciate and understand how, through experiential connection with the rest of creation, their understanding of creation and praying in creation can be reoriented.
2. Engage theologically with questions pertaining to how creation can be both a source and means that shape our corporate and individual prayer posture.

3. Explore how the theme of 'loss and damage' can help to shape our response to the care of creation.

Outline

Day 1: Celebration

The Cosmic Christ, all things held together and reconciled in/through him. (Col. 1:15-20)

- Welcome, prayer, and a general introduction to the topic by the moderator
- Community building activity: self-introduction by mentioning a tree from your country
- Talk about how trees share with us in praise and celebration
- Talk about the importance of trees living in community
- Small group activity related to trees.

Day 2: Europe

Story of the Good Samaritan. Go and do likewise. (Luke 10:25-37)

Creation as considered in various Christian spiritual traditions.

- The place of creation throughout the history of Christian spirituality
- The other side of the Christian response to nature (pagan nature mysticism)
- Looking at the great forests of Europe and the threats they face today
- First sharing of ideas for the report by the rapporteur.

Day 3: Lament/Compassion for Life

Jesus's healing of the man who cannot see (John 9:1-13)

Various Christian responses to the current climate crisis

- Summary of discussion and insights gained so far
- Several questions were discussed during this session about building blocks of prayer in creation. These include (1) Lament; (2) Creation's groaning; (3) Repentance; (4) Brokenness
- Second sharing of the report by the rapporteur.

Day 4: Act Justly

Jesus and the Syrophenician woman and Paul's declaration that there are no divisions: All are one. (Matthew 15:21-28 and Galatians 3:23-29)

Suggesting a model (or models) for Common Prayer

- Building further on the work of lament, the key point is exploring ways of acting justly
- Explore various ways for hands-on spiritual experiences which contribute to connecting with trees (personal & organizational) as we pursue environmental justice
- Final presentation/reading of the draft report (challenges and affirmations)
- Feedback from the rapporteur to the discussion and proposed changes
- Acceptance of report with rapporteur empowered to finalize the narrative part.

Affirmations

As our working group was beginning *tabula rasa*, we do not have a list of affirmations, but we have identified learnings, challenges, and recommendations for cultivating an ecological spirituality.

Learnings

1. When your heart is moved by prayer, it becomes an incarnational experience.
2. The need to cry and lament is important for us to move forward with this spirituality.
3. There is power in lamentation.
4. Lamenting is a way towards agency.
5. Lament is generative and dangerous and a way to speak truth to power (Pharaoh).
6. The radical nature of living in community.
7. Tree science shows us the way to live in community.
8. We need to weep more, and we need to dance more with creation.
9. The importance of reconciliation and reparation in confronting the climate crisis and moving towards ecological justice.
10. Ecological conversion is a spiritual conversion.

Recommendations

1. A scoping of extant materials on ecology and Christian spirituality, including what is happening at parish level.
2. Identifying the gaps in these materials.

3. Developing liturgical materials and study materials that sit alongside the above. We identify that there is a lack of liturgical material, although there are significant study materials.
4. Extending prayers for creation beyond the Season of Creation by reclaiming such traditional Christian festivals as Harvest, Rogation, and Solstice, and directives from such figures as Hildegard of Bingen.
5. Drafting a 'funeral liturgy for creation' (Liturgy of Lament for Creation). The liturgy should focus on the abuse of creation, lament our sins, celebrate what God has made, and repent/turn away from our egocentric ways – metanoia. This would include a litany for the species that have died or are dying.
6. Learning from and engaging with indigenous cultures that are already offering lament and honouring that which is lost, e.g., the cries of the Grandmother Water Protectors.
7. Learning and engaging with the youth movements for climate justice and the grief and repentance of the old.
8. Cultivate prayer and lament that comes from recognizing complex histories and presents will move us to a compassion of solidarity, repentance, and action.

Challenges

1. How do we focus our thoughts coherently in liturgical forms, symbols, words, and actions?
2. How do we pray not for creation but with creation?
3. How do we move from action into spirituality and vice versa?
4. How do we lament if we don't recognize a problem?
5. The challenge of weaving science into the Christian tradition and theology so that we can attune our spiritualities towards ecology.
6. Recognizing our materialism and moving from being consumers and exploiters of creation to companions of creation.
7. Change our attitudes that see humans as separate and superior to creation. Rather, we are stewards and also part of creation.
8. Reaffirming the radical hope that we find in the incarnation and the resurrection.
9. Recognizing that our prayers need to be both lament and celebration.
10. The economic and social costs of reparation that is a necessity for the loss and damage caused by industrialization.
11. Churches advocating for the importance of loss and damage to government and multinational corporations and at the same time recognizing their (the churches') role in colonial exploitation.

12. Our communities of faith must act together and remember that we only exist in relationship with one another. How do we pray and actualize together in love?
13. How do we, as Christians, explicitly reject the narrative of domination?

EC 6 BROADENING THE DIALOGUE ON THE CHURCH

Description

What is the ecumenical relationship between ways of being church that have emerged in connection with the globalization of Christianity and the search for a common understanding of the Church expressed in the 2012 WCC document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*?

Throughout the 20th century, the landscape of Christianity changed significantly. Primarily centred in the northern hemisphere, Christianity has become global and taken new contextualized forms in different continents. At the same time, new denominations, often proposing new ways of being church, have emerged. As a result, the search for the visible unity of the churches, which is at the core of the ecumenical movement, must face the challenge of reaching out to those communities or denominations which so far have not been partners in the ecumenical dialogue about the Church.

This ecumenical conversation will first offer a brief introduction to what the WCC Commission on Faith and Order has done in recent years on the common understanding of the Church and on the dialogue with new expressions of world Christianity. It will then propose a theological discussion on future steps towards the manifestation of Christian unity amidst a growing diversity of ways of being church.

Report of the proceedings

In the first session, the moderator introduced the task, the objectives, and the expected outcomes of the ecumenical conversation. Next, three resource persons, members of the Commission on Faith and Order, gave a thorough introduction to *TCTCV* and spoke on the churches' responses to it and on steps taken by Faith and Order towards broadening the ecclesiological conversation.

Rev. Dr Mel Robeck gave a brief talk on the historical background of Faith and Order's study on ecclesiology. The BEM document of 1982 was a landmark, indicating the convergences achieved in the understanding of baptism, eucharist, and ministry. After the Santiago de Compostela Conference, Faith and Order started to focus on the concept of *koinonia* and worked on *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*. With later improvements in the contents, a new study document was published, named *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. Finally, all the studies of the past two decades were brought together into the text of *TCTCV*, the second convergence text in the history of the Commission on Faith and Order.

Rev. Dr Stephanie Dietrich introduced the responses to *TCTCV*. Most responses came from the Global North, while only a few came from the

Global South. Upon analysis of the responses, a wide range of key themes was identified, including apostolic faith, authority, moral discernment, church and mission, church in and for the world, ecumenical councils, experience, *koinonia*, laity, legitimate diversity, sacraments and sacramentality of the church, the relationship between the local and universal church, the role of women, sin in relation to the church, threefold ministry, visible unity, and mutual recognition. After careful analysis of these themes, some basic agreements were identified, such as the four marks of the church, the commitment to visible unity, the common emphasis on mission, the relationship between Church universal and local churches in proclaiming the gospel, etc. Overall, it turned out that churches share more agreements than people think. With communion as the key common foundational understanding of the church, the responses from the churches suggest that further studies focus on baptismal ecclesiology together with eucharistic ecclesiology while affirming the ethical and missional function of the church. Future studies should also include an ecumenical theological anthropology (doctrine of humanity), especially in the area of human sexuality. In short, Faith and Order will continue to reflect in the future on what it is to be the church.

Rev. Dr Sotiris Boukis explained how the Commission on Faith and Order also broadened the dialogue to include churches from the Global South and from various denominational streams such as evangelicals, Pentecostals, charismatics and independents. He also highlighted the strategic importance of this broadening, as well as the fact that it led to more convergence, not less. The commission organized consultations with theologians from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as with representatives of different denominations, which resulted in fruitful outcomes. It also examined some relevant key bilateral dialogues. Ten key themes were identified for future deliberations: baptism in water and in Spirit, gifts of the Spirit, authoritative teaching, the role of experience, mission, and proselytism, sources of theology, sacraments, ministry, threefold ministry and the role of the laity, exclusive denominationalism, linking ecclesiology with spirituality, and pneumatology.

The presentation was well received by participants, although it contained a lot of information. Questions raised include the need to study the fast emergence and development of new forms of being church (e.g. migrant churches) in world Christianity, as well as the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic changed the world and the churches. The speakers responded by highlighting the importance for the churches of addressing such questions in unity and cooperation.

In the second session, three people outside the Faith and Order Commission offered responses to the presentations of the first session.

The Rev. Dr Mauro Batista De Souza said that, with the influence of the pandemic, people, old and young, especially in Latin America, felt tired and at

a loss. It was hard for people to face real life in this world. The Lutheran marks of Word and Sacraments should also be integrated with preaching the gospel in a new way and meeting the contemporary spiritual needs of people. From a Latin American perspective, living the church is prior to defining the church. With the Spirit's empowerment and transformative work, the church could be an effective witness to Christ's love in the world. The challenge of having 45,000 denominations in today's world was huge.

Rev. Dr Graham Gerald McGeoch offered the second response, also from the Brazilian context. He had been teaching *TCTCV* for the past four years, but he mentioned that students often could not tell the difference between ecumenism and communism due to the domestic political influence of the past years. Holding different social/political views often divided churches today. Yet, Graham's students thought that this was not reflected in *TCTCV*. In his context, systematic theology was done in praxis by visiting students in grassroots churches. Students only knew the local church without much knowledge of the universal Church. Among various levels of church life, Christians there focused on the practice of following Christ. For Brazilian Christians, as proposed by José Miguez Bonino, the ecclesiological question was not what the church is but what the church is for. He then discussed Georges Florovsky's two kinds of boundaries of the church (canonical and charismatic) and related responses with their implications for the churches. Finally, the work of Faith and Order was appreciated.

Prof. Dr Raimundo C. Barreto Jr asked the question of language regarding why Christians in Asia, Africa, and Latin America sent few responses on *TCTCV* and suggested that the WCC explore its relationship with churches in these continents. From a historical perspective, internal diversities have existed in churches since the first century. Meanwhile, the churches have also experienced various changes and have adjusted themselves to different times and contexts throughout the whole church history. So the question was how the WCC will meet the needs of people in today's world. The assembly theme was about unity and reconciliation, and we need to find out who is absent from this table of conversation. Thus attention should be given to the marginalized and inviting them into the *koinonia* of the Spirit.

Afterwards, participants were divided into five groups to discuss and reflect on both sessions. Each group was encouraged to bring affirmations and challenges from their discussions in order to build the report. It was noted that, again, the participants of this conversation were predominantly from the Global North and from denominations traditionally involved in the ecumenical movement.

In the third session, 20 minutes were spent listening to the small group reports.

Group 1 expressed deep appreciation for *TCTCV*. They proposed that discussions about baptismal and eucharistic ecclesiology be continued. The

inclusion of more churches, especially the churches that do not share a common history or background, should be the precondition for Faith and Order to carry out its ecclesiological studies. Furthermore, churches throughout the world should continue to learn from each other about churches' different historical paths of witness, ministries, and contextual realities. At the same time, churches should consider whether they were open to what the Spirit has done and is doing.

Group 2 appreciated the broadening of the table by inviting more churches outside the WCC to join the dialogue. The churches should also remember that their task is to meet the spiritual needs of the people; otherwise, people lose interest in the churches and start to leave. Talking about the nature of the church should also engage church people to think deeper. At the same time, a new mapping of global Christianity is suggested, as well as an imaginative view of the church, e.g. how it might look in 300 years. How could people take the Nicaea 325 jubilee as a focal point for envisioning the next 300 years? The mapping exercise had the potential to call for an altogether new council and reconstitution of the WCC, leading the fellowship into a more sufficient future role in world Christianity.

Group 3 reported that there was a great need to connect our traditional theology with the life of the people, especially the youth. There is a “continent of youth” disconnected from the church. Thus, we affirm the need to open up the conversation on ecclesiology and ask for a specific focus on youth. This also includes a focus on spirituality and authenticity. The Church cannot just be defined; it must be experienced. We affirm that we need ecclesiologies that take into account the life and experience of people that have no connection to the “institutionalized churches”. It was underlined that the digitalization of being church after COVID-19 needed to be addressed. The radical change in worship life needs to be addressed and discerned theologically. What do communion and community mean if they happen digitally? It was also underlined that our ecclesiology needs to have a wider perspective on the notion of “community” than the one based on eucharistic communion. There is a need for continued work on our understanding of the unity of the Church, for example. The climate crisis needs to be addressed through ecumenical community. There is a need to address spirituality as an important issue and the community of prayer as an aspect of ecclesiology. Ecclesiology needs to be discerned both theologically and empirically/sociologically. There is a need for a dialogical model of being Church as a tool to counteract fundamentalism. Cooperation in times of crisis shows that community is possible and necessary, and we can learn from this “crisis ecclesiology.”

Group 4 brought four main points: a) Appreciation of *TCTCV*, and discussions on baptismal ecclesiology and *koinonia* ecclesiology, as something that needs to continue. b) When talking about the church of the future, or the Church under the Spirit, our understanding must have a solid biblical

foundation. c) The family imagery of the church is very important, which points to the church not as a construction nor institution but as a family, a community of God. d) TCTCV describes the vision of visible unity, but how can visible unity be manifested via liturgy, gospel, sacrament, and apostolicity? Further exploration is needed.

Group 5 appreciated *TCTCV* and the concept of baptismal ecclesiology. They highlighted challenges of reception (e.g. lack of responses from the Global South; lack of interest in theology at the grassroots level as people often do not realize that ecclesiology is at the heart of new challenges that occurred, e.g., during the pandemic). The group also appreciated the emphasis on the church as a living reality and community of people. There was also a suggestion to integrate further the work done on other ecumenical dialogues (e.g. bilaterals) and also explore subregions (e.g. Southeast Asia, South Asia etc.)

Afterwards, participants continued the small group discussion, exploring what was not mentioned in the group reports and what further insights could be derived from them. Further feedback was given, and the leadership undertook to prepare the report, which was edited and approved in the fourth session, offering the below affirmations and challenges for the future work of the Commission on Faith and Order and the whole WCC.

Affirmations

TCTCV is a milestone in the study of ecclesiology, and it is greatly appreciated as a document.

The broadening of conversation is appreciated and needs to be developed further, both in its geographical and denominational dimensions, as well as through the study of different forms of being church and the historical ways of being church. There is a need for a new “mapping the *oikoumene*” of today and of a “new imagination” on how the future is being shaped. There is great potential for unearthing further convergences through a mutual ecumenical gifts exchange between the churches that were already part of the Commission on Faith and Order and those that were not.

Many key themes identified are worth further exploration (e.g. baptismal ecclesiology in synthesis with eucharistic ecclesiology; the pneumatological ecclesiology in integration with Christological; the relationship between the local and the universal church; the church as lived experience; the relationship of spirituality and ecclesiology; the gifts of the Spirit; legitimate diversity etc.)

We affirm that the church is not only something to be described but also something that has to be lived. Thus, we need an articulation of ecclesiology that integrates further the lived experience of church with our theologies about the church.

Challenges

How can the Commission on Faith and Order further synthesize the work done by the Commission in the previous years with what has been done in other parts of the ecumenical movement (e.g. bilateral dialogues, Global Christian Forum, etc.) in order to advance further the dialogue on ecclesiology? How can we be faithful to the convergence reached already about a common vision of the church while also listening to those churches in the broader context of changing world Christianity?

The COVID-19 pandemic raised various ecclesiological challenges and questions. What does it mean to be (and do) church in the midst of a pandemic? What are the theological presuppositions and implications of the pandemic in the liturgical, sacramental, communal, diaconal, and missional life of the church?

The digital revolution has raised new questions, both in terms of church services and in its broader church life, as well as in the daily life of believers. Where is the church in the online world?

The Commission on Faith and Order needs to think of ways to broaden the reception of its work among churches, in theological education, and among people at the grassroots level. At the same time, the churches must be encouraged to find ways to be ecumenical at local levels.

The issue of spirituality is key, especially for the “continent of youth” who are often disconnected from the church, longing for authenticity, spirituality, and an understanding of how theology is practically applied in daily life. The experience of secularization in many countries also raises the question of how the church can witness in a context where it does not have the same authority or cultural influence anymore.

“World Christianity is growing faster than the ecumenical movement.” How can the Commission on Faith and Order and WCC observe and prioritize in the best possible way the developments that are taking place? E.g., if world Christianity is extremely fragmented with thousands of independent churches globally, which must be the priorities? If the commission decides to focus on particular aspects (e.g. immigrant churches, ecclesial movements, etc.), which should have priority?

EC 7 CREATION JUSTICE NOW! CLIMATE ACTION AND WATER FOR LIFE

Description

Economic and ecological justice is at the centre of WCC's work. Participants in this ecumenical conversation will problematize the current climate and water crisis and explore together just and sustainable solutions for the healing of the earth. This conversation will encourage WCC member churches to understand the crisis as a justice issue and to engage in ministries of economic and ecological justice. The neo-liberal capitalist plunder of the planet and the people is the root cause of the crisis. This, in turn, has drastically disrupted the weather patterns, resulting in extreme weather conditions and pollution of land, water, and air, threatening the lives and livelihoods of many, especially the vulnerable communities, and destroying the commons. While the crisis is caused and perpetuated by corporations through extractivism, its impact is faced disproportionately by the Indigenous and subaltern communities. Climate justice is a matter of intergenerational justice, and it also affects other-than-human persons. Climate change, therefore, is a matter of planetary justice. Climate change manifests through water-related emergencies, and it contaminates water sources. The global water crisis is more than the non-availability of water. It is the commodification of water and its unequal distribution and accessibility.

Water is, therefore, an issue of rights and justice. There are communities that are disproportionately affected by climate and water crises due to their identity or experiences, such as race, caste, gender, disability, income, ethnicity, and the like. COVID-19 has further aggravated their vulnerability. Creation is “planetary *ubuntu*,”¹ created and found good by God. However, colonial and capitalist plunder has desecrated God's creation. In the context of corporate colonization and commodification of the commons, the Christian public witness is to redeem the planet and the people so that the spring of water will become a gift of life to all — an economy of life where we celebrate planetary solidarity. This ecumenical conversation is envisioned to inspire the participants of the assembly to be moved by the love of Christ to engage in planetary reconciliation and solidarity in the context of climate and water injustice.

Report of the proceedings

Purpose: As members of the ecumenical family, to discuss climate change and water crisis, listen to each other's stories of climate and water justice initiatives,

¹ Planetary *Ubuntu* is a term popularized by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to broaden the Zulu concept of Ubuntu to embrace the entire community of creation: I am because you are. We are because the planet is.”

identify affirmations and challenges for an ecumenical witness, and propose a road map for churches inspired by the love of Christ.

1. Problems analysis and reflections on causes

- In Latin America, agricultural exports deplete water. Overconsumption of meat and pollution depletes water and forests. Water use by the tech industry is under-regulated. Illegal mining causes pollution with mercury. Corruption causes unequal access to water.
- In the Middle East, governments fail to allocate water to priority uses, and access to water is inequitable. Floods are the result of climate change and “water grabbing.”
- People walk for miles to fetch water for drinking and domestic purposes. In Africa, irregular mining activities pollute rivers with dangerous chemicals such as mercury and cyanide, poisoning community water sources, killing fish, and depriving the people of their primary source of protein. The use of chemical fertilizers and insecticides on farms is causing the extinction of species.
- In North America, oil production through fracking consumes scarce water and contaminates wells. Industry gets access to water without paying for it and then pollutes it. Outsourcing production increases water extraction and water pollution in other countries.
- In the Asia Pacific, climate change has had a drastic effect on water. Not only does the rise in sea level decrease land available on low-lying islands, but saltwater intrusion also destroys their freshwater sources. The underlying causes of climate change are greed and colonization,
- Europe is experiencing the results of climate disruption in the form of migrating species and climate refugees, and xenophobia. The photovoltaic solar and windmills used as clean energy further disrupt the lives and livelihood of local indigenous people.

Challenges for faith communities include (1) creating a theology of climate emergency, (2) working with the education system to educate people about climate science, (3) prompting people to act on that science, and (4) shifting the attitudes of selfishness, greed, and apathy that underlie climate change, loss of biodiversity and ecosystem collapse.

2. Good practices and Transversals/ intersectionalities

Care for creation and justice are at the centre of the WCC’s work on climate change. WCC’s eco-justice programme promotes a “Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches for an Economy of Life and

Ecological Justice.” The WCC relentlessly advocates for climate justice at the annual Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change as well as in other fora.

The WCC Ecumenical Water Network calls for raising awareness of water justice in congregations through the Seven Week for Water Lenten Reflections and by training young people through Eco-Schools. WCC has joined the Blue Community movement that entails: (1) recognizing human rights for water; (2) promoting control over water and therefore saying no to the privatization of water; (3) banning the use of bottled water at their facilities and events when safe tap water is available; (4) cooperating with the Global South on concrete action to realize these principles. The WCC advocate’s for the implementation of the human right to water through various UN mechanisms.

After listening to the various resource persons who spoke on the intergenerational perspectives, Indigenous perspectives, and legal and UN frameworks, the group affirmed the following intersectionalities:

- The legacies of colonialism and plunder by neo-liberal capitalism continue to desecrate and commodify God’s creation
- Environmental Justice movements problematize the climate and water crisis as environmental racism and eco-casteism.
- The water crisis is more than scarcity and accessibility. “Creation Justice Now”, therefore, means abolishing environmental racism, patriarchy, ableism, eco-casteism, and classism to realize climate and water justice in our communities.
- Environmental injustice can deepen gendered social problems – the feminization of poverty in the communities.
- The water crisis will take away the food sovereignty of communities as a major threat to the survival of women and children.
- Disability rights are not separate from climate justice.
- Affirming the rights of migrants is a way of paying back our climate debts, which is climate reparation. Reconciliation is meaningless without reparation.

These stories invite churches to accompany the movements of the water protectors and land defenders of climate justice. Privilege will never go away if the systems that cause discrimination thrive. Our eco-justice ministries should lead to the annihilation of the prevailing system that causes and perpetuates climate and water injustice.

3. *Theological reflections:*

The session was designed to help participants reflect on the problems and affirmations they discussed as regional groups on the first day. The moderator, Archbishop Antje Jackelén, and Prof. George Zachariah led the session.

Archbishop Antje addressed the two stories of creation in the book of Genesis 1-2:4a and the second, starting from 2:4b. Each gives a different account: the first is to subdue and have dominion, and the second is delegation and relationship. When humans eat the fruit in the garden and discover that they are naked, the relationship to their own selves is established. It is a fascinating order: God, creation, neighbour, self. Life is relationality! To care for life is to care for this fourfold web of relationality in that order.

Prof. Zachariah gave a reflection on water justice and said that “water is a gift from God and a fundamental human right.” He then referred to the book of Revelation and referenced to the vision of hope, which was an invitation to decolonize ourselves and the planet. Revelation also proposes an alternative vision of water – water is a free gift and not a commodity. He, therefore, invited all to practice planetary *Ubuntu*.

The two presentations were followed by responses from resource persons, who reminded us that the Indigenous People also have creation stories (other than the biblical creation story) that are holistic and intimate processes of how to walk and live reverently with Mother Earth. They considered the *Ubuntu* concept of living life for the well-being of everyone significant for them as well. It was underlined to move from an anthropocentric mood to a biocentric one. And then the “theology of the peasants” was shared in the context of a community experiencing water poverty, particularly women and children.

Participants in their discussions questioned the economic model that started with the Club of Rome report *The Limits to Growth* in the 1970s. They called for changing our way of consumption and production. They further challenged the churches to divest from fossil fuel industries. Some others encouraged us to go “backwards,” meaning going back before colonial oppressions, when people lived with nature in a harmonious way. Some called out the structural sin, being at the root of the climate and water crisis and, therefore, urged the churches to address it theologically, calling for repentance.

Affirmations

We affirm:

1. the urgency of action in response to the climate and water crisis
2. the climate and water crisis is the result of systemic sin and structural injustices, which intersects with other profound crises
3. all of creation is interconnected and relational

4. laments from the ends of the earth, groaning of the whole community of creation as they encounter the climate and water crisis
5. the colonization of people and planet is at the root of crisis
6. colonization, systemic greed, neo-liberal capitalism, and extractive industries have commodified God's creation, destroying the Indigenous ethos and practices of planetary *Ubuntu* and putting profit over people and the planet
7. the climate and water crisis disproportionately affects those who have contributed the least to the crisis, especially because of colonialism, capitalism, racism, patriarchy, casteism, and ableism
8. the deep relationship between spirituality of Indigenous People and the environment as part of God's creation
9. the current crisis, the anti-imperial biblical imperative, and the cosmic significance of the sacraments require repentance that entails reconstructing the social, economic, ecological, and spiritual relations
10. The need for planetary reconciliation involving decolonizing work and genuine expressions of reparation.

Challenges

Given the interconnectedness of the climate and water crisis with all other crises:

1. We urge the WCC to strengthen the climate justice and water justice programs and make the climate emergency a transversal priority in all their work
2. We urge the WCC to intentionally include the voices of the youth, children, women, disabled people, and Indigenous Peoples
3. We urge the WCC to encourage theological institutions and member churches to include climate justice and water justice in their teaching and preaching
4. We urge the WCC to include and promote eco-justice diaconal work at all levels, operating and managing their resources sustainably
5. We urge the WCC to further develop and implement a road map towards ecological, economic, social, and spiritual sustainability specific to different contexts
6. We urge the WCC to invite all member churches to declare themselves as Blue Communities, promoting the human right to water and contesting all attempts to commodify water.
7. We challenge the WCC to support a just transition from fossil fuels, to oppose destructive technologies and extractive plundering of the earth, and to support just sharing of resources and technologies

8. We urge the WCC to act to protect the water protectors, land defenders, and climate activists
9. We encourage the WCC to advocate for an international ecocide law.

EC 8 WHO LIVES, WHO DIES, WHO CARES?: THE CHURCHES' ROLE IN HEALTH AND HEALING TODAY

Description

“Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that churches can and should play a more proactive role in promoting a holistic understanding of health and wellness. Churches have always helped turn the tide on health matters when they bring all their gifts and talents to bear. Indeed health and healing were central features of Christ's ministry and his call to his followers. Ahead of the 2030 target of SDGs and amid efforts to “build back better” post-COVID-19, this ecumenical conversation will explore the unique contributions that churches can make at this critical juncture at different levels.

Whereas churches have a strong witness through running hospitals and clinics in many parts of the world, the area of congregation-based health promotion is not widely appreciated. This ecumenical conversation will promote a holistic understanding of health and wellness, with practical strategies for responding to current and future challenges.

Report of the proceedings

Specific objectives of this ecumenical conversation were to i) reflect on the theological and ethical basis of medical mission, with bearing on our times; ii) deepen understanding of health and healing, laying emphasis on churches as healing communities; iii) explore ecumenical partnerships and resources to strengthen churches' health ministries globally; and iv) agree on key strategies for sustainable health ministries.

Leadership of the conversation comprised Rev. Teyi Godson Lawson Kpavuvu (Eglise Methodiste du Togo) moderator, Rev. Dr Miriam Burnett (African Methodist Episcopal Church) facilitator, Deaconess Marlene Seenathsingh (Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago) rapporteur.

Resource persons were Rev Dr Georgios Basioudis (Network of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for Pastoral Health Care), Dr Gisela Schneider (German Institute for Medical Mission), and Dr Ronald Lalthanmawia (Christian Conference of Asia).

WCC staff support was provided by Dr Mwai Makoka, programme executive for Health and Healing, and Ms Ayoko Bahun-Wilson, EHAI coordinator for West Africa.

Participants: A total of 21 assembly delegates participated in the EC, besides the leadership and resource persons. The participants were from Africa, North America, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Europe.

Daily summaries

Day 1

- Opening prayer, welcome, introductions, and overview by the moderator
- Presentation on “Health-promoting churches: a model for comprehensive congregation-based ministry for health and wellness” by Dr Mwai Makoka
- Presentation on major opportunities and challenges of Christian health services globally by Dr Gisela Schneider
- Sharing experiences by participants on congregation-based health promotion ministries, challenges, good practices, and unique features in small groups and reporting back

Day 2:

- Opening prayer
- Summary by the moderator of discussion and insights gained so far
- Panel discussion between a medical scientist (Dr Lathanmawia) and a theologian (Rev Dr Basioudis), moderated by Rev Dr Burnett on “Scientific and ethical considerations on emerging health issues” exploring methodologies and tools for discerning a Christian response to complex health issues
- Discussions on issues that are ethically and theologically challenging
- Summary of main discussion points by rapporteur

Day 3:

- Opening prayer
- Summary of discussion and insights gained so far by the moderator
- Presentation on documentation, capacity building, advocacy, and networking for health ministries by Dr Lathanmawia
- Discussions in small groups proposing strategic activities to strengthen our systems for health ministries
- Report-back in plenary and discussions
- Summary of main discussion points by rapporteur and comments to it

Day 4:

- Presentation/Reading of the draft report
- Groups discussion on the report concentrating on affirmations and challenges
- Plenary discussion on affirmations and challenges
- Feedback from the rapporteur(s) on the discussion and proposed changes
- Acceptance of report with rapporteur empowered to finalize the narrative part

As expected, the conversation was overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic in two ways. Firstly, some participants and leaders pulled out because they tested positive for COVID-19 during the assembly. Secondly, the medical, ethical, legal, biotechnological, moral, and other considerations were at the top of the people's minds, many of whom had strong personal experiences and feelings on these issues. There was a great temptation, therefore, for this to become a COVID-19 ecumenical conversation. With great skill and understanding, the leaders of this ecumenical conversation and the participants managed to go beyond the major issues with the pandemic and managed to discuss the greater concerns befitting this EC, for which they are all greatly commended.

Affirmations

We recognize the epochal work that the Christian Medical Commission of WCC has accomplished from 1968 – 1998 and reaffirm the foundation laid in working for justice and health.

After two years of a pandemic, we recognize the enormous challenges that churches face with increasing poverty, a loss of perspective, and an increasing challenge of mental health issues, especially among young people. Therefore, we affirm that:

1. It is part of God's call to the church to minister in health and healing with compassion and unconditional love in the spirit of Jesus Christ, the servant healer and author of peace, justice, and reconciliation
2. Churches continue to have a unique, relevant and specific role to play in health, health care, and healing and wholeness. This is especially for the crises of the 21st century, such as growing inequities, climate change, pandemics, and massive demographic changes in different regions

3. The WCC definition of health calls for the participation of all in prevention, promotion, treatment, care, and rehabilitation, as well as the engagement for justice, peace, and reconciliation
4. The (re-)establishment of the WCC Commission of the Churches on Health and Healing (CCHH) is required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 3 – health and wellbeing for all at all ages – in a holistic manner as a baseline for their work
5. The Health-Promoting Churches model equips the church for holistic health ministries (health education, practical action, advocacy, and public witness) through which faith and science are complementary
6. Religious leaders play an important role in health-promoting churches. Training, best practices, and interreligious dialogue is needed and must be published and made useful for others
7. Health equity must be part of the advocacy work addressing issues such as access to treatment, diagnostics, or vaccines for all. Justice issues such as trade regulations, poverty, and other social determinants of health as well as working towards a world without rape and violence (Thursdays in Black) at national, regional, and international levels
8. Primary Health Care principles and their call to health for all and community empowerment is the basis for health work, and collaboration and partnership between faith-based health services and governments must be strengthened at national, regional, and international levels.

Challenges

The ecumenical conversation has identified the following challenges:

1. The church has an important role to play in responding to the increasing risk for new and emerging communicable and chronic diseases due to the climate crisis and the lack of social security systems that pushes people into extreme poverty
2. The church should be concerned with the social root causes of mental health issues and conditions, especially for young people and others that face unsurmountable problems of poverty, trauma, and loss
3. Churches must address stigmatization, discrimination, dignity, and justice for people living with diseases and different physical and mental abilities and for those at the margins

4. Rapidly developing science is causing theological and ethical debates in many churches, creating a need for guidance and education on this new information (cf. *Christian Perspective on Theological Anthropology*, Faith and Order Paper 199)
5. We must support the health of Indigenous communities and recognize the value of traditional practices
6. New ways of governance and management of church-owned hospitals and health facilities must be developed that will allow ministry to the poor and marginalized, including health financing and long-term sustainability
7. We must create new ways of addressing the global health worker crisis, capacity building, and ensuring that diaconal values in Christian health work are strengthened.

EC 9 ECONOMY OF LIFE IN A TIME OF INEQUALITY, PERSISTENT HUNGER, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND THE 4TH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Description

Persistent hunger, scandalous levels of inequality, structural racism, runaway climate change, and destructive pandemics have exposed the brokenness of our prevailing economic order and point to the urgency of pursuing an Economy of Life for all, now. In many parts of the world, systems of governance are being eroded and even corrupted by financial interests. Rooted in growth-driven, profit-oriented, and inherently unsustainable systems of production and consumption, ecological destruction and biodiversity loss are accelerating at an alarming pace, undermining the bases of livelihoods of the global poor, farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and future generations. Increasingly, artificial intelligence, digitalization, genetic manipulation, and other new technologies are touted as 'solutions' to the myriad crises confronting humanity, but at the same time raise profound socio-ethical questions.

How, then, do we live our Christian faith and practice transforming discipleship in current times and landscapes shaped by financial capital? What can we harvest as key learnings, effective strategies, and life-affirming alternatives from our engagement as churches in economic and food justice from Busan to Karlsruhe? What are some of the deep-seated as well as emerging challenges, and what are the key roles of churches and faith communities in addressing these? What can we learn from the perspectives of communities living on the margins and in close relation with nature with a view to striving for reparative and restorative economies?

This ecumenical conversation looks to deepen the WCC's historic programmatic engagement for justice in the economy and the earth in response to the challenges ahead and to God's continuing call to transform and be transformed in love.

Report of the proceedings

The first session featured a slideshow capturing key pieces of the WCC's work for an economy of life from Busan to Karlsruhe as well as an intergenerational conversation on building an Economy of Life between Dr Cynthia Moe-Lobeda and Ms Katlego Mohuba.

Dr Cynthia Moe Lobeda shared that *corporate- and finance-driven* global capitalism had two deadly impacts. First, it concentrates obscene levels of wealth in very few hands through policies and practices that impoverish and

even kill multitudes of other people. Secondly, the fossil-fuelled and extractive financial-economic system is at the root of the climate catastrophe. The moral travesty is that climate change brings destruction first and foremost to people who are NOT causing it – primarily the world’s impoverished people – while those who are causing it to continue to reap material benefits. Contemporary capitalism also is undermining democracy. Through the “New International, Financial, and Economic Architecture,” the WCC – together with ecumenical partners – has stepped forth as a leader in the global movement to build more equitable, ecological, and democratic economies at local, national and global levels.

Ms Katlego Mohuba emphasized that the capitalist economic system is driving the climate crisis, food insecurity, and hunger, as well as adversely impacting the living standards, livelihoods, and human dignity of the majority of people in South Africa and other parts of the world. The South African economy prioritizes urbanization and ignores rural development, producing urban poverty, unemployment, and hunger. These drive a phenomenon called “survival sex,” which is not a lifestyle choice. The challenges highlighted here are intersectional and require us to reflect on how food insecurity intersects not only with skills shortage or climate change but also with the power imbalance between genders and how some human beings forego their dignity to use their bodies as a means to an end; as an economic resource in exchange for food, shelter, and other basic needs that are essential for survival. In response, there is a need to design and maintain life-giving food systems that are not primarily profit-driven but guarantee affordability and accessibility of food for impoverished people as well as promote ecological sustainability.

The second session offered diverse theo-ethical reflections on an Economy of Life by Rev. Dr Seong-won Park, Dr Lizette Tapia-Raquel, and Rev. Dr Upolu Vaai.

Rev. Dr Seong Won Park underlined that the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) would radically change not only what and how we do things but also who we are. Through 4IR technologies, human beings now have the capacity to create and genetically manipulate nature (*Homo Deus*). Such technologies are presently in the hands of a wealthy and powerful few. In the very near future, artificial intelligence is expected to surpass human intelligence (*Robot Sapiens*). Machines could eventually govern human societies. Churches must reflect deeply on the role of technology in the Economy of Life and beyond.

Dr Lizette Tapia-Raquel shared how marginalized people look at concepts of reconciliation, unity, justice, and peace through the lens of an alternative farming community in the Philippines that is fighting for land rights and is practising organic agricultural methods and cooperative forms of economic organization. She highlighted the role of young (women) seminarians in accompanying the struggles of this farming community and how this experience then shapes their theology and praxis in profound ways. She

discussed how capitalist values of commodification manifest in the online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC). The phenomenon is spurred by the abject poverty produced by the dominant economic system and new social media technologies. Truth-telling should be part of the process of building an economy of life through reconciliation.

Rev. Dr Upolu Vaai emphasized the importance of changing and shaping the development narrative based on the “(Pacific) Household of God” that enables a better understanding of care for our common home and the interrelationships in the whole community. Key to this is indigenous knowledge and concepts such as custodianship as well as the need for re-education and ecumenical cooperation. “The Reweaving the Ecological Mat” initiative enables Pacific communities to envision, rethink, and shape development in their own eyes and with their own resources. Reconciling the *oikos* triplets (economy, ecology, and *oikoumene*) allows for a communities-based and cosmocentric narrative of life.

In the third session, buzz groups reflected on the following questions: (1) what are the reasons that our planet and its people have reached the situation, (2) what key changes do we have to make to be able to create a just world, (3) what theological and spiritual resource do we need to achieve our goal, and (4) what can ecumenical movement do at this stage?

In the last session, participants discussed and agreed on the key affirmations and challenges arising from the ecumenical conversation.

Affirmations

The participants affirmed that:

1. Economy is a matter of faith (Psalm 24: 1). As the loving body of Christ, the church is called to seek “the fullness of life for all,” expressed as a commandment and promise to “love thy neighbour as God loves” (Mark 12:31). We are all part of one household of God. We heard stories of poverty, inequality, persistent hunger, climate crisis, and the challenges of 4IR from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific arising from national and global economic policies.
2. All of creation is beautifully and wonderfully crafted by God, and we are called by God to covenantal relationships with each other – we are neighbours and relatives. However, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and certain theologies have institutionalized the belief that humans are superior to nature, fuelling greed in relationships for the benefit of a few and imperilling the health of the planet and the future of all living beings. We are assaulted by consumerism and are seduced into believing that decadence will provide wholeness.

3. The economic crisis is at the root of the climate and broader planetary emergency. The economic and ecological crisis cannot be separated. We are in the midst of a spiritual, moral, ethical, theological, philosophical, and economic crisis that has led to alienation and brokenness of relationships between humans, between humans and the rest of creation, and between humans and God.
4. The compliance with prevailing extractive and exploitative economic systems – which are killing people, building exorbitant wealth for a few at the cost of others’ lives, land, basic rights, or cultures, and destroying our only home and bases of sustenance – is structural evil.
5. Deep repentance as *metanoia* acknowledges that the violence of poverty and violence against ecology are sins against God’s good creation and entails reparation and restoration.
6. The world urgently needs a “New International Financial and Economic Architecture” (NIFEA) for an Economy of Life founded on God’s call to love the neighbour as God loves and shaped by deep listening to the cries of creation and the proposals of people on the underside of the global economy – persons living in poverty, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and racially-discriminated communities. The WCC – together with ecumenical, interfaith, and secular partners – has to offer an alternative vision and framework of action for a NIFEA rooted in justice-oriented scriptures.

Challenges

The participants acknowledged the following challenges:

Transforming church and theology

1. Churches must normalize discussions on the economy as fundamentally moral and theological concerns and talk about repentance for systemic and individual sins together in order to spiritualize these ‘secular’ ideas into ‘theological subjects,’ which churches must contend with.
2. Churches’ actions for systemic transformation towards an economy of life and climate justice must begin now and be shaped by stories of communities which validate the experiences, narratives, beliefs, and calls of marginalized groups and by deep listening to the groaning of creation.
3. Churches must hold each other accountable and reckon with their complicity in unjust economic theologies, ideologies, and systems that create and normalize unjust realities. Churches must side with farmers, workers, and those who cannot work (e.g., persons

living with certain disabilities, children, and elderly) and not with corporations and governments.

4. They must also reflect and respond concertedly to emerging challenges that will have seismic implications for economies and ways of living, namely the 4IR. Technology must serve life and not profit.

Transforming education and the development narrative

5. The predominant education system does not value the earth and its connectedness to every part of the creation, demanding holistic, intersectional, communities-based, and contextual approaches that affirm the wholeness of life and Christ's love for the marginalized. These are key to changing the development story.
6. Re-education begins with truth-telling – naming what, who, and how economies of death are perpetuated so that we can dismantle them.
7. Transformative education also means engaging with new platforms and technologies to educate, challenge, and also learn from young people.

Transforming partnerships and strategic bridge building

8. The urgent and interlinked economic and ecological challenges demand mutual exchange and learning, strategic partnerships, and bridge building not only between churches but also relating to religions, like-minded governments, NGOs, and social movements.

Transforming financial and economic systems

9. Many people cannot imagine a world without capitalism. Churches are challenged to articulate and describe more concretely what alternative economic indicators, policies, institutions, and systems look like, e.g., food sovereignty, cooperatives, ZacTax, debt cancellation, Reweaving the Ecological Mat, and alternative measures of wellbeing. The challenge is not just talking about alternatives but also producing, promoting, advocating for, and living out alternatives to capitalism.
10. Communities-based initiatives and national and global advocacy at the UN and other policy-setting arenas must walk hand-in-hand. Such initiatives and advocacy must speak to the intersections between economic, ecological, and gender justice.

EC 10 ECUMENICAL *DIAKONIA* – LOCAL AND GLOBAL FAITH ACTORS BUILDING BACK BETTER

Description

Faith actors are important agents of change and transformation. Jointly, members of WCC and ACT Alliance are recognized for their impact at local, national, and global levels – not least their diverse and innovative responses to COVID-19. How do we reinforce this? This ecumenical conversation aims to energize the collaborative Christian contribution to a better and more just future in three ways:

1. Share examples of Christian social action (*diakonia*) on issues such as COVID-19, HIV and AIDS, gender justice, climate change, and other contemporary challenges. How can we finance and build capacity? How can we engage with the UN Sustainable Development Goals?
2. Strengthen our theological and conceptual understanding by working with the WCC and ACT Alliance document *Called to Transformative Action – Ecumenical Diakonia*. This can help to develop a better understanding of ecumenical *diakonia*, with better ways and structures of cooperation, including in education and training.
3. Re-imagine diaconal literacy, capacity building, and education jointly across WCC and ACT Alliance, including the use of the recently published *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*. This ecumenical conversation is jointly organized by the WCC and ACT Alliance.

Report of the proceedings

Objectives

- Strengthening understanding of ecumenical *diakonia* at all levels (congregational to international)
- Identifying areas of collaboration, capacity sharing, and joint resource mobilization of churches and ACT Forums at the country level
- Sharing experiences of diaconal engagement with the UN 2030 Agenda and SDGs
- Mapping opportunities for ecumenical *diakonia* education in the current context, including the use of the study document *Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia*, the *International Handbooks on Ecumenical Diakonia* and *Creation Care*, and other publications, e-modules, etc

- Identification of a joint WCC and ACT Alliance agenda for advancing ecumenical *diakonia*

Expected outcomes

- Engagement with the key themes of the recently-published joint WCC and ACT Alliance study document *Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia*.
- Strengthening the contextual understanding of ecumenical *diakonia* and identification of key areas and future priorities for churches, the wider ecumenical movement, ACT Alliance, and the WCC.

The planning group believes that these expected objectives and outcomes have been fulfilled through this ecumenical conversation.

The ecumenical conversation consisted of a focus on three areas of ecumenical *diakonia*, with a concluding discussion discerning ideas for future priorities.

Summary of the four days:

Day 1

Collaboration between WCC church members and ACT Forums based on ecumenical *diakonia*, including the presentation of a learning process in Malawi and Cameroon led by Dr Bob Kikuyu and Corrie van der Ven.

- Introduction to the study document *Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia*. This publication aims to outline theological and practical service for *diakonia*. It is offered as a resource to facilitate learning and encourage good practices. It highlights the prophetic *diakonia* that addresses peacebuilding, climate justice, gender justice, racial justice, health and healing. It also aims to address the diverse practices of *diakonia* – including in different confessional and geographic contexts – and the theological background of *diakonia* as well as highlighting the danger of misleading theologies. Recommendations for future work in ecumenical *diakonia* are listed in Chapter 10.
- Engagement with the learning process on collaboration between ACT National Forums and WCC member churches in Malawi and Cameroon.
- Welcome and encourage further initiatives similar to the above.
- Points from discussions included
 - Creation of safe spaces for discussion on both difficult and easy issues
 - Collaboration is very important

- Welcome and encourage training programs
- The importance of communication and coordination
- Effective use of existing structures
- Interaction versus transactional relationships
- Danger of paternalistic spoon-feeding from donors

Day 2

Engagement of the WCC and ACT Alliance with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, based on ecumenical *diakonia*, led by Dr Thorsten Goebel and Gladys Nairuba.

Panellists included Gladys Nairuba (Side by Side movement for gender justice); Dr Marianna Leite (ACT Alliance); Patricia Mungcal (NCC Philippines); Yilikal Shiferaw (Ethiopian Orthodox Church DICAC); Rev. Professor Kjell Nordstokke (by Zoom).

- Addressing the question of how ecumenical *diakonia* relates to the SDGs, and what the concept and practice of ecumenical *diakonia* can contribute to building forward better and more sustainably?
- Introduction to the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a contemporary framework for *diakonia*, including challenges, by Rev. Professor Kjell Nordstokke.
- Engagement with Chapter 5 of *Called to Transformation*, especially public space as a context for diaconal work, the relationship between the SDGs and the diaconal agenda of the churches, discernment, and the strategic and practical dimension of the SDGs:
 - SDG 5 – Gender Equality: local churches engaged in gender equality
 - SDG 3 – Health: local and international COVID-19 response by congregations and networks
 - SDG 16 – Peace and Just Societies: local church actors engaged in conflict prevention and peacebuilding: churches’ roles and possibilities
- Points from discussions included:
 - Appropriate language: use of “bilingual” and “multilingual” approaches to communicate with secular and faith partners.
 - COVID highlighted disparities between the global north and south
 - A conscious shift from aid to justice
 - Address the systemic change needed
 - Ecumenical *diakonia* as both faith-based and rights-based.

Day 3

Capacity development in Ecumenical *Diakonia* within WCC and ACT Alliance, including a focus on diaconal (social diaconal and eco-diaconal) education, ed by Rev. Prof Dr Dietrich Werner and Bishop Prof. Dr Beate Hofmann.

Panellists included Dr Theresa Carino (Amity Foundation), Prof. Dr Daniel Beros (Iglesia Evangelica del Rio de la Plata), and Rev. Dr Fidon Mwombeki (All Africa Conference of Churches).

- Identification of challenges and good practices
- Looking at resources, including the new *International Handbooks* on (1) Ecumenical *Diakonia* and (2) Creation Care & Eco-*Diakonia*
- Discussions and recommendations for international collaboration in training and education
- Consideration of innovative measures (including institutional instruments) to enhance inter-contextual and global capacity building and learning in ecumenical *diakonia*
- Recommend that churches and partners should be involved in ecumenical, intercultural, and interfaith learning on social witness, prophetic *diakonia*, and eco-*diakonia*
- Strengthen and expand confessional, ecumenical, and ecological *diakonia* scholarship programs to increase capacity and leadership development in the areas of ecumenical *diakonia*, social ecumenical ethics, and eco-*diakonia*

Day 4

Consideration of this report and looking towards the development of a WCC and ACT Alliance joint action plan for advancing ecumenical *diakonia* (including the WCC's future work programme), led by Rev. Dr Ebenezer Joseph, with the report presented by Rev. Dr Gunilla Hallonsten.

This report was discussed in small groups and in plenary. The affirmations and challenges, together with the report as a whole, were approved by consensus.

Affirmations

1. The ecumenical conversation affirms the importance of the publication *Called to Transformation - Ecumenical Diakonia*. We strongly affirm that all the points listed in Chapter 10 remain important for the work of the WCC, ACT Alliance, and member churches throughout this decade.
2. We affirm that ecumenical *diakonia* should be a programme priority for WCC, together with a joint ecumenical action plan with ACT Alliance. We encourage that this joint ecumenical action plan

- should be drawn up as soon as possible, with recommendations to the central committee of the WCC in 2023 with a roadmap up to 2030.
3. We affirm the necessity of a joint reference group between WCC and ACT Alliance on ecumenical *diakonia*.
 4. We affirm the changing landscape of diaconal action where the 2030 Agenda and the UN SDGs are relevant reference points and a platform for diaconal engagement, with specific themes as priority areas for diaconal action such as migration, economic justice, climate justice, gender justice, and health justice.
 5. We affirm *diakonia* as faith- and rights-based action, as interrelated social, political, and ecological action, and as being an intrinsic dimension of being church and the prophetic dimension of diaconal action.
 6. We affirm the wisdom and the power of people living in poverty. Instead of working for people living in poverty, or even with them, *diakonia* must create spaces of action, which allows those at the margins not only to be subjects but protagonists in the struggle for a better future for all. In the ecumenical language, we call this localization for *diakonia* from the margins or grassroots.
 7. We affirm the centrality of hope and love. From the perspective of Christian faith, every human being has the right to hope for a better future. Faith justifies such hope; it grounds it in God's love and active solidarity with people living in poverty. From this perspective, hope is not passive wishing that something better may happen. Hope is defiant action struggling to bring present what faith envisages. In that sense, ecumenical *diakonia* is our shared effort in support of this right to hope.
 8. We affirm the necessity of WCC's diaconal work to collaborate with CCIA, climate justice, and others.
 9. We affirm the importance of capacity building, training, and education in ecumenical *diakonia*.

Challenges

1. The need for "multilingualism" in discussing *diakonia* and development: being relevant in both faith and secular contexts.
2. Resources: human, physical, and financial are in limited supply.
3. The need to ensure global accessibility of and engagement with the publication *Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia*.
4. Diaconal action must be critical and ready to unmask injustice and unsustainable practices. Advocacy must be an integral part of all

diaconal programmes and projects. Our time requires for *diakonia* to be prophetic!

5. The current crisis requires urgency. This demands cooperation and coordination, both among church-based actors and with other agencies. At the same time, it also requires a more holistic approach, in the sense that transformation implies that we all must take responsibility for building a just and sustainable world wherever we live.
6. For Christians and churches, this call to transformation is a call to break from established views and practices and to embark on a courageous journey towards alternative models of action, lifestyle, and spirituality.
7. The necessity to coordinate work to strengthen relations between churches, NCCs, and ACT national forums.
8. In the development of training programs, the WCC and ACT Alliance should cooperate to help facilitate cooperation between churches and agencies.

EC 11 CONVERSATIONS ON THE PILGRIM WAY: INVITATION TO JOURNEY TOGETHER ON MATTERS OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

Description

At the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan, in response to the issues raised during the ecumenical conversations, business sessions, and other presentations regarding the challenges that issues of human sexuality pose to WCC member churches and its constituencies, the assembly through the Programme Guidelines Committee made the following recommendation: “Being aware of divisive issues among churches, the WCC can function as a safe space to enter into dialogue and moral discernment on matters which the churches find challenging. Examples which have been heard strongly in this assembly include questions of gender and human sexuality. Controversial issues have their place within that safe space on the common agenda, remembering that tolerance is not enough, but the baseline is love and mutual respect.”

In response to the above recommendation, the WCC general secretary formed both a staff group and a Reference Group on Human Sexuality to work on a resource document, which was presented to the WCC executive committee in November 2019. The membership of the reference group has reflected geographical and church affiliation balances and has included some members of relevant civil society. The document has drawn on the work of the various WCC commissions and programmes. This is the latest phase of a variety of conferences, consultations, and study processes in a 60-year series of discussions within the WCC and the member churches on issues related to human sexuality. Beginning with the assembly in New Delhi in 1961, each subsequent assembly has raised concerns about issues of human sexuality and has mandated work to be undertaken, of which this resource document is the most recent and most comprehensive manifestation.

Report of the proceedings

The moderator of the ecumenical conversation, Rev. Silishebo Silishebo (United Church of Zambia), welcomed the members and introduced the duties of the ecumenical conversation and particularly this first session. He further introduced the rapporteur of the conversation Rev. Marianne H. Brekken from the Church of Norway, the four resource persons, and the staff. The participants in the ecumenical conversation gathered with the overall aim “to promote discussion on how conversations on human sexuality are being

carried out in different contexts and how it can be carried out in the future, emphasizing love and reconciliation.”

The WCC president for Europe and moderator of the Reference Group on Human Sexuality (RGHS), Archbishop Emeritus Anders Wejryd (Church of Sweden) introduced the mandate given in Busan in 2013. He further gave an orientation on the work of the RGHS and highlighted how it was important to establish a safe space for dialogue in the group. He recognized that creating this safe space was and is difficult and demands a mindset and willingness to journey together – including when we disagree. Wejryd then introduced the resource document *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way: Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality*. This document was developed by the reference group and received by the central committee in February 2022 as a resource document for those churches willing to conduct conversations on human sexuality. Finally, Wejryd underlined that the document is not a policy document but a resource for those churches willing to conduct conversations on human sexuality.

After the presentation, participants were asked to discuss the common understanding of the document, the key areas of the work of the RGHS that we can learn from, and the potential affirmations and challenges for the WCC, churches, and ecumenical partners. From the group discussions, it was highlighted that the document gives a snapshot of different churches’ approaches and processes on human sexuality. In different ways, participants affirmed the document as a resource for further dialogue. Participants of the conversation valued how the document brings perspectives from different church traditions from all over the world and therefore saw it as a tool for conversations on human sexuality. At the same time, the participants in the ecumenical conversation recognize that just having this conversation in the assembly and in churches is difficult for many; it is hurtful that some churches or members leave because the discussion comes up, and for others, it is hurtful that it is necessary to have a discussion about their own life, sexuality, and love. However, it was also mentioned that the document is gentle, moderate, and, for some, too “middle of the road”; it is a tool for conversations on human sexuality and, so, about human nature. Others asked for understanding of those churches to which the document seems too radical and which are not yet considering using it in their churches.

The second session of the conversation focused on sharing experiences from churches and ecumenical organizations. The objective was to identify how the different churches and ecumenical organizations relate to the issues raised in the document from their own contexts. The four resource persons shared their own experiences working on human sexuality. Fr Thomas Ninan from India shared the journey of this work in the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). He explained that the NCCI’s work on human sexuality started in 2001, even before its engagement with HIV and AIDS. The first outcome was a document

in 2003, which was initially not programmatic. There were differences among some churches in 2009 with the NCCI, which opposed its support of the court judgement, terming it as involving “unnatural sex”; however, a consensus on dialogue was reached through an ecumenical document on human sexuality in 2012, and a programmatic engagement started in 2015. Since 2014, people from the LGBTQIA+1 communities and allies have served as advisors on the work.

Ms Celina Falk from the Church of Sweden shared that the work on homosexuality in the church started in the 1970s. Currently, the debate continues, and it is an ongoing process. The Church of Sweden works theologically on gender issues, and there is pastoral recognition of sexuality, for example, conducting “rainbow services.” This work allowed a certification process for parishes that wanted to learn more about these issues. The theological reflection, education, and movements such as “Me Too” helped in vocalizing the sexual abuse of women in the context of the church, as well as the need for further work to prevent sexual abuse and gender-based violence.

Rev. Dr André S. Musskopf from Brazil talked about his personal experience growing up in the Lutheran tradition, preparing to serve in ministry. He shared how his ordination was denied because of his assumed sexual orientation. Over twenty years, Rev. Dr Musskopf worked with different denominations and organizations, explaining the issues of religious citizenship of LGBTQIA+ persons, breaking the silence on issues of human sexuality so that people understand that it is part of everybody’s lives and should be permanently on the agenda of churches and communities. Rev. Dr Musskopf was finally accepted and ordained in the Baptist tradition.

Rev. Judith Kotze from Inclusive and Affirming Ministries, based in South Africa, shared how the work on human sexuality is long and complex, especially when it looks at issues of the ordination of women and also same-sex/same gender relationships. Rev. Kotze shared her story as someone from the Dutch Reformed Church, which withdrew from the World Council of Churches because of theology that accepted Apartheid and thereby isolated itself in the process. Years later, and for the first time in decades, the DRC is participating in this assembly as a full member with delegates. The extremely painful costs and suffering caused by its separation, oppressive interpretations of the Bible, and self-isolation are enormous. Returning to the WCC after having recognized its sinful role in Apartheid, the DRC believes that the importance of continued conversations on difficult issues like human sexuality cannot be overestimated. We, both as churches and as humans, need one another to grow, be challenged, have mutual accountability, and experience reconciliation and unity. Rev. Kotze sketched similarities between the issue of race and sexuality, asserting that it is important for churches to recognize that they do not always

1 LGBTQIA+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and more community.

have all the answers, and that the inability to shift perspectives and allow one's theologies to be challenged leads to self-isolation.

The moderator thanked every person for sharing their experiences and ensured that we would try to make this conversation a safe space, respecting confidentiality and each other's theology, stories, and experiences.

Participants worked in groups and continued sharing their own experiences. In all the groups, it was clear that we need space for sharing personal stories; therefore, we must dare to talk openly, considering that some issues are still taboo, denied, or demonized. The stories of people exist even if some churches are not willing to conduct conversations about human sexuality. A particularly important aspect raised was how to hold the tension between different experiences of agency and marginalization and how to ensure that people's traumatic experiences are not just appropriated for "display" or as a spectacle. It was underlined that communication and education are needed to continue the conversations within and between churches.

It was acknowledged and affirmed that churches have different processes and understandings in dealing with questions around human sexuality; that is why this is an ongoing dialogue and part of the human experience. It also relates back to the *Conversation on the Pilgrim Way* because one document cannot cover all issues, be seen as a final document on a topic, or as satisfying all positions, especially considering that some churches do not understand the reasoning for engaging in the conversations. Change is present in how we see human sexuality in theology and science and cultural and social definitions of human sexuality. In that way, the conversation is never finished – but should be an ongoing process. It was also commented that all churches do have levels of conversation about human sexuality, but it may not be an aspect that this document touches upon. An example is teaching about marriage – which is also about human sexuality.

In several of the groups, it was mentioned that many of the discussions within churches on the topic of sexuality are related to the issue of marriage and ordination of clergy. However, it was also underlined that it is a challenge when someone's own life comes up for debate and vote in the churches. Some also raised the point that we have to realize that the main challenge might be changing our attitudes towards human sexuality as a whole and overcoming theological traditions and ideas that have a negative view of sex and sexuality. From the discussion, it became clear that those churches already working on reconciliation processes with the LGBTQIA+ community require telling stories of LGBTQIA+ people's experiences with the church because the stories are there. This is the same for the experiences of survivors of sexual abuse. In that sense, storytelling is an important step in all conversations about human sexuality because stories help churches understand issues in a relational way, realizing that some persons of the fellowship are experiencing them directly.

In the third session of the conversation, the group gave general feedback on Chapter 8 of *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way* and discussed recommendations for future work on human sexuality for the WCC, churches, and ecumenical partners. The small groups gave strong affirmation for the ongoing process of this work and recommended that the future work be made accessible in multiple platforms, encouraging members to join the conversations. Some suggestions included creating an online platform, a living library, and an ecumenical network of churches working on human sexuality in a way that carry forward different stories and gives tools for continuing the pilgrimage. Several of the participants also affirmed the need to continue the work with a reference group or staff desk on human sexuality. Some also suggested a commission, as a commitment together towards life. The continued work should focus on dialogue and theology and continue the work on this topic with the Commission on Faith and Order. This work could be done as suggested in Chapter 8 of the document, including the addendum and continuing the work on a study guide.

Furthermore, the WCC and the wider fellowship should make space for churches to join the pilgrimage. It is an open invitation to journey together and to create relations, not only seeing human sexuality as dogma or abstract theology but as something based on lived life experiences. The group also discussed that, in the WCC, we are not a fellowship of “agreement.” The WCC has long experience conducting dialogue and conversations with different visions but joint work (baptism, eucharist, ordination of women, etc.), and it should be possible to give room for others to continue the conversation or journey even when some churches are not ready to join in.

The group would like to highlight the importance of giving room to continue in this journey because:

*There are those marginalized, and there are those not even recognized as marginalized,
it is a challenge for churches to hear and recognize all voices.*

Affirmations

1. *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way: Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality* is an important global resource document provided for study, reflection, and dialogue in churches and between churches that are interested in this conversation. The document is broad, both in the sense that it was developed respecting different views within the fellowship and broad in the sense that it addresses sexuality in its widest form. In that way, the document functions as a navigation platform for further journeys discussing human sexuality in churches and ecumenical settings.

2. *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way* offers a theology both of embodiment and for the dignity of all human beings created in God's image and created for relations.
3. *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way* was developed with a methodology of building trust and a safe space for conversation on human sexuality, which can be used as a model for future conversations.
4. The power of storytelling and building relationships is an important part of conducting conversations on human sexuality because it allows the conversations to take place with growing empathy and understanding for all those participating.
5. Conducting conversations on a pilgrim way is an ongoing process because our sexuality is with us our whole lives, and we can learn from each other as our understanding evolves, growing in relation to each other in a more sensitive, affirming, and respectful way. It is important to affirm that human sexuality is a gift from God for us to appreciate our diversity and experience the joy of wholeness.
6. Following the commitment to those living at the margins (*Together Towards Life – Busan 2013*) and the work of the Commission on Faith and Order as stated in *Moral Discernment* which deepens the theological, biblical reflection, the group affirms the need for the work of a reference group on human sexuality for the future work of the WCC and ecumenical partners.
7. The group affirms the recommendations presented in Chapter 8 of *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way*, the need for an addendum with updated information, and the creation of a study guide to accompany the document.

Challenges

1. While *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way* is a broad and balanced document, the fact that it is wide in its focus – covering many aspects relating to human sexuality – means that some topics, such as gender, intersex, and asexuality, are not addressed in much detail or to the extent that some people would find helpful. Further conversations should include those of us with disabilities and Indigenous People.
2. While *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way* builds on the need for establishing safe spaces, the spaces are not safe yet, and this should be acknowledged in our discussions. A methodology or study guide is needed.
3. Conversations on human sexuality are taking place in all churches and fellowships, but they might not cover all issues; for example, some churches might be talking about marriage and gender-based

violence but not discuss issues of LGBTQIA+ people. Therefore, the challenge is to create an understanding and willingness to step back and let those who are willing carry the conversation forward on their own terms.

4. These conversations on human sexuality do not happen in a linear process; rather, they are cyclic and dynamic. Therefore, the challenge is to create safer spaces with multiple encounters, commitment, forbearance, love, compassion, and respect.
5. We recognize that there are those marginalized and those not even recognized as marginalized; it is a challenge for churches to hear and recognize all voices.
6. The learning has to continue since issues relating to human sexuality are diverse, complex, intersectional, contextual, and very sensitive, especially where trauma, violence, abuse, and discrimination occur. Finally, the main challenge for the churches, the fellowship as a whole, as well as for the WCC is the realization that the pilgrimage can never be finished.

EC 12 TRENDS AND EMERGING ISSUES IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

Description

The overall aim is to discuss and reflect on trends and issues in a rapidly changing world that will affect the life and work of churches 20 years from now, to guide ethical and moral discernment, and to contribute to checks and balances for the development and utilization of these technologies. The conversation addresses serious common challenges faced by churches and societies, inclusive of the megatrends identified by the Assembly Planning Committee – namely, digitalization and militarization.

Though there are many trends and emerging issues, this ecumenical conversation will limit itself to four trends and emerging issues:

1. *New ways of being church and community.* The COVID-19 pandemic has given us a glimpse of how communities are benefitting from a connected world. We can expect a more connected world with technologies such as holographic projection and virtual reality becoming commonplace, enabling faith communities to gather in groups and worship, no matter how distant the congregants are. It could also give rise to more diversity in faith practices, religions, and sects, creating their realities and ‘echo chambers.’
2. *Demographic transformation.* The world population is estimated to reach 9.2 billion in 2040, with a rising proportion of younger people in Africa and globally increasing ageing populations. This informs churches and faith communities to have to adapt to serve in a more personalized manner to the different populations more effectively, to remain relevant and transformative. Faith is expected to continue to remain an important facet of human society.
3. *Artificial intelligence (AI).* Algorithm-driven artificial intelligence will continue to spread and become all-pervasive. Networked artificial intelligence will amplify human effectiveness but also threaten human autonomy, agency, and capabilities. The threats include: a) Potential risk to human agency, with individuals and society experiencing a loss of control over their lives and becoming overdependent on AI. b) AI will take over jobs and widen economic divides, leading to social upheaval. c) Data abuse and surveillance designed for profit or for exercising power and weaponizing information. d) Entrenching autonomous weapons, killer robots, and cybercrime.
4. *Tinkering with Life: Genetic Modification.* Technology that lets us edit DNA (CRISPR/cas9) is already available. This technology

will be further developed and used in medical therapies. While the technology opens doors to curing diseases, it also enables the possibility to radically enhance human genomes. We might use tools, including CRISPR/cas9, to edit genes that influence traits such as intelligence, physical features, ableism, and lifespan. Issues related to access, communities, and human dignity must be addressed.

Report of the proceedings

Members noted that there were a number of discoveries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The distinction between the benefits of online and analogue meetings, depending on the context, might be useful. It was important to analyze when online was helpful and when meeting in presence was of advantage. It was further noted that online tools were not equally available. There were some churches with economic challenges that could not afford the equipment to enable them to have all required instruments for Zoom services of worship. It was also discovered that the gap between the haves and have-nots has widened.

Digitalization was used as a means of bringing generations together, with young people bringing social media and other tech expertise. Digitalization increases connections. Some people are more willing to go deeper when they are on a platform such as Zoom in the comfort of their own homes. Though such facilities are important, they could not be accessible to everyone. There are possible barriers to the positive potential of digitalization, which includes socio-economic privilege or lack of internet/tech access (rural/urban, money, knowledge).

Members also noted that, during the pandemic, the youth were actively involved in organizing services of worship on Zoom because of their knowledge of modern technologies. It was an advantage as the youth felt they were participating in the leadership. This was very helpful as the concept of the youth being future leaders and not the present ones was reviewed. It was further noted that the demographic transformation will have a different impact globally. It was recognized that young people are experts and creators of their future and therefore have to raise their voices and be included in decision-making processes. Older people are respected for their experience and guidance in integrating innovative approaches.

While the population is growing and many people will be migrating, the church will continue to ensure that no one is left behind and that everyone will be included in shaping a sustainable world, regardless of their age, gender, religion, or heritage. We value all perspectives and the epistemic and Indigenous knowledge that helps us to understand how we can protect biodiversity and understand ourselves as part of nature. Churches invite everyone to join and

work together in an open forum to be part of a transformation into a world without hate, racism, or any kind of discrimination. Looking at the future with a technology that has the power to shape machines in any way, we need to make sure that diversity is being valued and will be preserved. In the past two years, we have learnt how quickly most people can adjust to a digitalized world. It helped us to understand that we are one big global family. We will need to remain creative and innovative in finding ways to reach out to people online and analogue, making sure that everyone can take part in an active church life.

Members deliberated on the question of understanding what a good life was in the context of AI and genetic modification, including enhancements. A good life includes physical, mental, and spiritual health. Several people, for example, identified the potential benefits of tech that can save us time (and reduce stress) to make more space for things such as building relationships, enjoying life, and appreciating beauty. Also, medical therapies can help to protect life.

Despite the above narrative, an important question is what should be “fixed” if we are to respect what it means to be made in God’s image. Participants raised the additional question of what it means to be made in God’s image. For example, is breast augmentation desirable or not from a Christian perspective? Usually, not, but if breast augmentation could save someone from suicide, for example, then yes. And there is a great need to protect people on the social margins and the diversity of being made in God’s image (e.g. prevent the changing of skin colour using genetic modification tech!). How do we help build people’s self-esteem as made in God’s image before more human enhancement tech is available? Christianity claims we are all of value and wonderfully made (perfect).

Other important questions include what suffering is and which suffering should we ameliorate through tech. And especially issues related to social justice: the gap between haves and have-nots, access, allocation of resources, and public funding. How do we assess each tech and motivations/reasons for using and not using it? In particular, we must analyze the role of capitalism and interest groups (power). Also, we must flag technologies that can promote destruction (e.g. more weapons, drones) versus those that can help to save a life (e.g., drones used to find and rescue missing people).

Affirmations and challenges

1. *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Matthew 5:9*

In the fragmentation and division of our world, church and Christian communities have a unifying ministry.

Despite global connectedness, our world is increasingly experiencing division and isolation. God's spirit connects people in manifold ways. Virtual encounters are not meant to replace physical encounters but offer possibilities of new experiences with new tools of communication. We are concerned for connections not only among the current people of the world but also future generations, particularly in light of germ-line editing. The biblical *Shalom* stands for more than peace but for a just world united in solidarity and successive generations.

2. *“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works that I know very well.” Psalm 139: 13,14*

Dignity and wholeness as biblical concepts to overcome the dichotomy of body and soul

We affirm that each person is created with their own dignity and glimmer of God. To be created in God's image means to be creative. We have a healing mandate, and technology can contribute to healing and the duty to do good for the whole creation. There is also the possibility for harm, such as in the case of semi-autonomous and autonomous weapons or moves to “own” life or life-saving medical therapies.

Western philosophy and theology are characterised by the dichotomy of body and soul. Progress in new technologies (biomedicine, neurotechnology, AI etc.) are shaped by the uniqueness, i.e. also, the autonomy of human life¹, which allows a limitless development of the human being. The principle of wholeness perceives the human being in his physicality and spirituality. Community instead of singularity emphasizes the biblically-based principles of interdependence and the alterity of human existence.

3. *“Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good”; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21*

Church must be open to changing dialogue

The biblical narrative is characterized by the discerning function of open dialogue. Openness also means a critical examination of scientific knowledge, technological development, power, and access to Big Data. A sustainable ecclesiology also includes the question of the role of the church in state and society and its ability to engage in dialogue with regard to scientific knowledge, technological developments, power, and access to Big Data, which includes questions that were not fully addressed.

¹ Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. (Penguin (Non-Classics), 2005)

4. *“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)*

Social justice and the preference for those on the margins are key principles that suggest we need to promote the principle of inclusive co-design. We affirm the importance of including diverse people in consultations regarding the creation of emerging tech/AI. We uphold the potential and reality of technology to empower diverse people, including people with disabilities. We are concerned that genetic modification technologies may be used to “edit out” ways of being human that may be considered flawed even though they are part of God’s perfection.

5. *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” (Revelation 21:1)*

For what do we hope? We affirm that we need more intentionality about what we want to achieve through tech and AI. When we fall prey to idolatries of profit, power, or human perfection, we fail to see those underlying values informing capitalism, ableism, and racialized norms that are shaping our tech. Part of hope is the ability to radically re-imagine what it means to be God’s people and God’s church in a digital and technological age. People should manage technology and not be managed by it.

6. *“ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you.” (Job 12:8)*

The Creator is our teacher, and God’s creation illuminates his teaching, and we are all related. Education concerns human beings in its integrity, body and soul. We value all perspectives in a fast-changing world and cherish a global dialogue that supports an understanding and dealing with the new challenges ahead. In the aim of leaving no one behind (which includes nature that provides us life), we affirm that education and active participation on global platforms are important keys in helping to comprehend and reflect on the impacts and possibilities that new technologies globally have and in finding our own truth with the ambiguities they might cause. We invite everyone to join and to be part of the solution.

7. *“Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. (2 Corinthians 12:7b)*

We are called to humility, and we must confess our ignorance.

In future, churches will see changes and will also need to be part of the changes, of a transformation that has the potential to lead us to reconciliation and unity. Let's be the role-model for global politics by listening to the ones on the margins, joining with young people, and equally including all generations in the decision-making processes and reminding ourselves of the power a united church can have when joining hands with a society that shares our values. We affirm to become a thorn in the flesh of political decision-makers, making sure that the impacts of their decisions will not harm future generations.

EC 13 TOWARDS A JUST PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Description

The question of just peace in the Middle East remains at the heart of the work of the ecumenical movement. Unfortunately, wars and conflicts, both regional and national, external and internal, and international geopolitical struggles have all led to long-lasting circles of violence, destruction of the social cohesion systems in place, and social injustices, and threatened all populations of the region, but above all the most vulnerable among the religious, ethnic, and cultural groups, such as the Christians.

During the past years, the realities in the Middle East have highlighted another dimension, more specific to us Christians and churches, the moral dimension of conflicts. The perspective of human rights and Christian ethics when it comes to conflict management, peace negotiations, comprehensive transitional justice, and reconciliation processes and the implementation and process management of peace with justice are now emerging as the main challenges.

What does that mean to multi-religious and multicultural societies? How can we guarantee the freedom of religion and belief and equal citizenship when there are huge gaps between what the constitution says and how that is applied in the public sphere?

Finally, what are the future perspectives that we should expect from a post-conflict Middle East, and what does that mean for our churches in the region? The crucial question of the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East remains central to the global fellowship of churches. The ecumenical movement has an important role to play in shaping the future narratives for peace and social cohesion while ensuring and strengthening the role and place of Christians as equal actors and partners of the Middle East.

Report of the proceedings

Over the four sessions, the ecumenical conversation heard presentations from three speakers representing Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt.

On the first day of the conversation, under the title “We Cannot Only Pray for Peace and Invest in Violence,” Rev. Ashraf Tannous sketched the political, religious, and social implications of conflicts that the Palestinians are undergoing. The speaker reminded the audience about the unjust and unlawful practices of Israel: in continuing to build settlements over the occupied land of Palestine; the restrictions imposed on the Palestinians’ movements within the territories, including access to Jerusalem and the Holy sites; the denial of

Palestinians' right of self-determination and the return to their homeland; the systematic discrimination which is constantly practised against Palestinians; the un-ended siege of Gaza, and the control of water access for Palestinians in the West Bank. The speaker affirmed the facts and challenges that due to the discriminative and planned practices of Israel, the Christian presence in the Holy Land is at stake. He called on the global ecumenical and international communities to stand firm against all these practices, which are against international law and resolutions.

On the second day of the conversation, under the title “The Just Peace Challenges in Iraq: A Christian Point of View,” Father Emmanuel Yokhana presented the existential challenges facing the Iraqi minorities, particularly Christians and Yazidis. He touched on the facts of the marginalization of ethnoreligious minorities and the lack of an equal citizenship state which is practised in legislation and educational curricula. These facts and others, which include political instability and lack of security, are leading to the exodus and the fading of Christian presence in their historical homeland. He called on Iraqi churches to coordinate their efforts within an ecumenical framework to jointly voice and work on restoring the Christian role in the service of Iraqi society. He also called for building bridges between the diverse Iraqi components of the society to restore Iraq to its civilized role with the participation of all its components inclusively and equally.

On the third day of the conversation, under the title “Diversity and Peace in Egypt a Panoramic View and Challenges,” Dr Marianne A. Azer highlighted the main pillars of diversity and peace in Egypt. On the political level, the speaker highlighted the presidential initiatives for Christians to be included in each and every aspect of society, including the new Egyptian constitution and the quota of Christians in Parliament, the national dialogue initiative, and the legislation for building churches. On the social level, the speaker gave examples of initiatives such as A Life of Dignity Project in which churches are involved, the Pre-Marriage Counselling initiative to preserve peace within the family, the Family House initiative to enhance Christian-Muslim dialogue, as well as empowering the work of the National Council of Women and National Council of Churches in Egypt. These initiatives and many others are intended to build awareness and create a road map for peace education.

Affirmations

The ecumenical conversation affirmed that:

1. Peace cannot be implemented in the Middle East without comprehensive justice and reconciliation.
2. The continuous Israeli expansion settlement on the occupied lands of the West Bank and Jerusalem, as well as the denial of the

- Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homeland, is a violation of UN resolutions and international law.
3. In light of the emerging factors of instability of political and economic situations, genocides, the absence of social justice, lack of equal citizenship, and the continuous violence and armed conflicts across many of the Middle East countries are endangering the Christian and other religious components presence.
 4. The absence of freedom of religion and belief, the restriction of access and movements to holy sites, the denial of the right to self-determination, the violation of basic human rights, and systematic discrimination are impacting the lives of vulnerable people and are creating unsafe living conditions.
 5. Protecting the religious and ethnic diversities of Middle Eastern communities is an essential condition to achieve stability, security and safety.
 6. The economic sanctions on Syria and the siege on Gaza are depriving vulnerable people, especially women and children, of their own subsistence of food and medicine, worsening the humanitarian situation at large, and prohibiting engagement in reconstruction and rehabilitation activities.

Challenges

The ecumenical conversation has highlighted the following challenges:

1. Churches and Christians of the Middle East are authentic components of their various societies. The constant exodus of Christians from the Middle East due to the above-affirmed factors is seriously endangering their presence and impacting the religious, ethnic, and social demographic and diverse cohesion of their societies. The decreasing number of Christians is also impacting their role as witnesses of Christian faith in a region where Christianity was born and as bridging facilitators of dialogue and peacemakers within their own societies on the one hand, and as facilitators of dialogue between East and West on the other hand. Therefore, the global ecumenical fellowship and faith-based organizations are challenged to empower local churches of the Middle East by listening to their prophetic voices and cooperating with them in their struggle to maintain the presence and witness of Christians in the region.
2. The global ecumenical fellowship and faith-based organizations are challenged to advocate for human rights and stand firm against all types of religious and ethnic discrimination in the Middle East. It is significant to advocate for the establishment of a just and

- comprehensive peace in Palestine/Israel, the rights for Palestinians to self-determination, and the right of equal citizenship across the Middle East countries.
3. The global ecumenical fellowship and faith-based organizations are called to advocate and challenge their governments in accordance with international laws against the continuous establishment of Israel's settlement on the occupied lands of Palestine, as well as financing these unjust and illegal settlements.

EC 14 ECUMENICAL CALL TO JUST PEACE: HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO PEACEBUILDING

Description

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace was initiated by the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea, in 2013 as the guiding and overarching thrust for the WCC's work. The assembly in Busan identified priority regions and countries of focus for our common journey together for just peace. These priority countries and regions include countries of the Middle East, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Burundi, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Colombia, the Korean Peninsula, and, more recently, others have been added to the list.

The period from Busan (10th Assembly) to Karlsruhe (11th Assembly) has been defined by the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, pursuing a holistic vision of just peace as described in the 10th Assembly Statement on the Way of Just Peace. This ecumenical conversation will examine how churches in key national contexts – especially those identified as priority countries during this period – have responded to this call, the challenges they have faced, how the ecumenical movement has sought to support and accompany churches and communities in those contexts, and the impact of those efforts. (A separate ecumenical conversation – EC 13 – will address the issue of Just Peace in the Middle East.) In addition to learning about churches' efforts to promote a just peace in their own contexts, this ecumenical conversation will seek to identify best practices and lessons learned from these experiences and to further develop the ecumenical approach to holistic peacebuilding.

Report of the proceedings

In light of the Assembly theme “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity,” the first session “The Things That Make for Peace,” focused on biblical and theological reflections on the things that make for peace as well as WCC policy and ecumenical approaches to peacebuilding. Prof. Dr Konrad Raiser, former WCC general secretary and a protestant theologian, reminded and introduced us to the various steps that the ecumenical movement has undertaken in thinking about issues of war and peace since our founding in 1948. He referred to the fundamental shift that had happened since the 1990s when the WCC started taking just peace as starting point rather than just war. These discussions led to the adoption of the “Ecumenical Call to Just Peace” by the WCC 10th Assembly. Prof. Raiser stated: “On the Way of Just Peace, we are called to persevere in the continuous process of establishing right and sustainable relationships in community, with the earth, concerning the economy and among nations.”

After this theological groundwork, we heard about the current situation in South Sudan. Fr James Oyet Latansio, South Sudan Council of Churches, a Roman Catholic priest, shared with us how South Sudan has gone through a period of violence and how ecumenical approaches to peacebuilding had been missing. He told us about a dramatic, powerful incident that became a turning point: in a situation when a gunman tried to kill him, bishops from other churches protected him. It became the starting point for joint cooperation. Fr Latansio stated: “Just peace is lacking in the context of South Sudan. We should make a U-turn in all violent situations. Peace is possible if we work ecumenically. We need to work ecumenically in order to turn from violence to peace.”

Summarising our discussions, we affirmed that Just Peace is a journey to the presence of God. It is a journey, not a one-day event. When the churches come and act together, there is power. The challenge is for the church, not for the churches, we need to act as one.

Session 2, “Seeking a Just Peace – Challenges and Achievements,” reflected on the preceding session and heard voices from different contexts and a range of country experiences. Most of the cases had been WCC priority countries.

Rev. Dr John Joseph Hayab (Baptist), chairperson of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) shared about the multi-ethnic and multi-religious situation in Nigeria, where conflicts are often stirred by ethnoreligious differences. He gave examples of violence leading to colossal loss of lives and stated that already over 100 churches had shut down due to banditry. With the Christian Association of Nigeria, he works on strengthening a culture of peace between believers of diverse faiths and stressed the importance of making visible the perpetrators and the invisible hands behind them.

Rev. Vilma Isabel Yanez Ogaza, a Presbyterian delegate from Colombia, shared about the current state of the peace process in her country. She referred to the highly important work of DiPaz (Diálogo Intereclesial por la Paz de Colombia), an interchurch platform for dialogue for peace in Colombia. DiPaz not only helps communities affected by armed conflict but was also successful in contributing ecumenically to the peace agreement between the Colombian government and former FARC fighters.

The general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK), Rev. Hong Jung Lee, described concrete directions to be reaffirmed for the future ecumenical movement engaged in the ongoing Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace for the Korean Peninsula and suggested developing an alliance of peace diplomacy. He stated: “Peace does not come from the muzzle of guns and is not made by presidents and their generals. The main subjects of peacebuilding are us, ‘we the people,’ who live on the democratic values of sovereignty resting with people.”

“Women and Youth in Peacebuilding” was the topic of our third session. We listened and learned from women and youth engagement in the Pilgrimage

of Justice and Peace from Busan to Karlsruhe's achievements and challenges, and we highlighted constructive ways the WCC can strengthen the role of women and youth in our common pilgrimage from Karlsruhe to the 12th Assembly.

Prof. Dr Azza Karam, general secretary of Religions for Peace (RfP), referred to the UN Resolution 1325 and reminded us that the engagement of women in peacebuilding is not optional and not an afterthought, but that it needs to be deliberate and intentional in any conflict situation.

She stated that governments often tend to think that peacebuilding efforts are led by them only and that they usually do include leaders of faith in a significant way, thus ignoring their potential. In those cases where faith leaders are included, women are mostly not called upon to be present at the table. Prof. Karam, during her input, extended the hand of RfP to strengthen the cooperation with the WCC as well as working together on other levels of the respective constituencies.

Euna Cho, a youth pastor from South Korea, talked about her experiences of a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Korea which was initiated and led by young people. Church programmes, she said, should not be for but by young people. She stated: "Peace is learned by direct encounters, not through theoretical or academic studies."

Affirmations

We recollect our affirmation that "war is contrary to the will of God," as was stated by our founding assembly in Amsterdam in 1948.

We affirm the "Ecumenical Call to Just Peace" as it was adopted by the WCC 10th assembly. The focus on the vision of just peace represents a fundamental shift in the theological and ethical approach to the issue of peace-making.

Instead of struggling with the question of whether war can still be considered an act of justice, theological and ethical reflection now starts from the prophetic affirmation that "peace is the fruit of justice and law" (Isaiah 48:18).

Instead of the static notion of peace as the absence of war or violent conflict, we re-appropriate an ecumenical reflection on the dynamic biblical understanding of peace as *shalom*, which expresses the interdependent relationship between justice and peace.

Challenges

We base our recommendations on the understanding of peace as a process. Just Peace is never static – it needs participation and attention all along.

We acknowledge that peace is possible when we work ecumenically and therefore *call* upon the WCC and its member churches to work on

ecumenical approaches to conflict transformation, reconciliation processes, and peacebuilding projects at the local, national, and global level.

We **encourage** the WCC to establish round tables, accompaniment processes, and exchanges of peacebuilding where different parties in the conflict are brought together. Conflict transformation needs to identify the invisible hands in a conflict and include them in the process.

We **commit** ourselves as the WCC and ask our member churches to increase the number of women sitting at the table rather than solely serving the table when it comes to peacebuilding processes and discussions. This requires training and the necessary resources.

We **recommend** strengthening the cooperation of national councils of churches with inter-religious councils in peacebuilding efforts as well as strengthening the partnership of the WCC with Religions for Peace.

We **call** on the WCC and its member churches to strengthen their position as faith-based insider mediators in conflict situations by intensifying links with governments and diplomats. When governments abuse power and trample on peoples' rights, we **urge** the WCC to listen to the voices of those who are suffering and to boldly amplify their calls.

We **endorse** the WCC to strengthen programmes of youth and peacebuilding in co-operation with the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) as well as other youth organizations, with national councils of churches, and member churches. Based on the positive experience of the youth-led pilgrimage of justice and peace in South Korea, the WCC should initiate similar projects around the world.

We **support** the WCC in developing education modules for a culture of just peace, with a special focus on children and youth. We dream of an assembly with a significant number of children in attendance.

We **encourage** the WCC to strengthen networks of theological institutions on peacebuilding and to encourage curricula revisions to include concepts of just peace at theological seminaries.

WCC shall understand just peace as a spiritual challenge and continuously conduct a prayer movement for peace, where we can energize each other.

EC 15 FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF: THE CHURCH AND OTHERS IN THE FACE OF RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND OPPRESSION

Description

This ecumenical conversation will address concerns about Christian suffering and persecution or marginalization within the framework of promoting the understanding and acceptance of the principle of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) as applicable to all people regardless of faith or belief. In addition, the issue of how FoRB claims are being used in some cases to suppress the rights of others must also be addressed.

Different regions and different groups of people experience violations of FoRB in a varied manner. In some contexts, one minority religion might suffer particular discrimination; in another, the marginalization might be experienced by all except the majority religion. Inevitably, it is women, children, people with disabilities, and migrant or refugee populations who are particularly affected. Information about the different regions and how different groups are affected should be integrated across the four sessions of this conversation. The theological underpinnings of the principles of FoRB should be woven throughout the conversation.

Report of the proceedings

In the months leading up to the conversation, the WCC was supported in the development of plans through the valuable contributions of SMC–Faith in Development/the Freedom of Religion or Belief Learning Platform¹ and expresses its deep appreciation for this invaluable assistance.

All four days began with a prayer provided by representatives of different church traditions and ensuring a gender and youth balance. The consensus method, using orange and blue cards, was used, as well as online methods for gathering participants' inputs.

On day 1, Prof. Dr Heiner Bielefeldt set the context with respect to the international legal framework for FoRB, reflected on the situation for Christians and the Church globally – giving some country examples – and confirmed that FoRB must be understood as being applicable to all people. He stressed that there are three B's that society needs to uphold: Believing, Behaving, and Belonging. The focus of FoRB is the legal recognition and affirmation of one's

¹ The Freedom of Religion or Belief Learning Platform provides resources to help individuals, communities and decision-makers learn about, reflect upon and promote freedom of religion or belief for all. <https://www.forb-learning.org>

personhood and human dignity, and FoRB is indispensable to human rights. The **challenge** is for churches to be human rights defenders.

Rev. Dr Patrick Schnabel introduced the upcoming edition of the *German Ecumenical Report* on the global state of Religious Freedom for Christians, which is at intervals published by the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) and the German Bishops' Conference (DBK). The publication seeks to show solidarity with fellow Christians worldwide, highlight situations of harassment, discrimination and persecution, and raise awareness of FoRB as a universal right embedded in the wider universal human rights framework. He echoed the need for enforcement of this framework for FoRB to be fully protected and emphasized that whilst the state must not legislate on faith matters, its legislation must take the faith or belief of its people into account and ensure its free practice for all.

Participants were invited to express their feelings or reflection on certain statements about FoRB and **affirmed** that equal rights and equal access to rights are essential. **Challenges** include violations of FoRB in the context of family or marriage, through forced conversion, and the particular vulnerabilities of women.

On day 2, key speaker Ms Jennifer Christine Jag Jivan spoke about the situation of the church in her country of Pakistan. Violence is a serious concern, and whilst the government provides police security for large churches so that it is possible to worship, ordinary Christians suffer from blasphemy accusations, low job opportunities, forced conversions, mob violence, terrorism, and impunity for perpetrators of violence. The church remains resilient despite these challenges, and young people continue to attend and seek to serve. There is a need for a strategy of dialogue at the political, economic, inter-religious, and cultural levels. As people of faith of whatever religion, we must engage in a deep theological reflection on where our religion stands today and seek the truth within and without.

A series of speakers representing different countries (Nigeria, Iraq, Lebanon, and India) and different faiths (Christian, Muslim, and Zoroastrian) shared brief reports about particular FoRB concerns in their countries. Speakers and participants highlighted examples of how Christians and people of all religions and beliefs and particularly minorities and migrants, face discrimination, harassment, violence, and oppression on the basis of their identities and their peaceful expressions of faith and belief.

The distinctive violations of freedom of religion or belief faced by women and girls were mentioned as a particular **challenge**, including discrimination and exclusion, street harassment, control, inequities in access to education for girls, sexual violence, forced conversion, forced marriage, and forced sterilization, violations compounded by vulnerabilities on the basis of sex and by patriarchal systems across many countries. Participants recognized the **challenges** to

women's rights, and FoRB posed in many contexts by discriminatory religious and secular personal status laws.

The exacerbation of these violations and the resulting devastation of lives and communities in situations of war and conflict is of grave concern. Participants highlighted the centrality of the right to life. These and other examples illustrate how the **challenge** of FoRB violations can impact all areas of life and other rights – for example, rights to land, education, and health. Concern was expressed about the targeting of places of worship, religious leaders, and religious institutions both by groups bent on violence and intolerance and by states seeking authoritarian control. Participants pointed to structural violence and the complex historical, political, cultural, religious, and economic factors and the corruption that underlies structures of oppression, including norms around caste and gender. Grave concern was expressed about global trends of religious nationalism, extremism, and shrinking democratic space for faith groups and all of civil society.

In relation to this, participants raised the **challenge** that it contributes to systematic violations of FoRB and hinders the development of mutual understanding of trust when necessary borders between the spheres of the state and religious institutions become blurred. Whilst religious people and institutions may well engage in political and advocacy work, they must not instrumentalize state authority to enforce religious convictions upon others. Likewise, while the state should be interested in including religious voices in public discourse, it must not use religion as a means of furthering political agendas or exclude people of other faiths and convictions from public rights and offices.

Whilst it was recognized that many countries do have high standards of freedom of religion or belief in law, it remains a **challenge** that these standards are not adequately implemented and upheld in practice, and many countries continue to place limitations on FoRB that are contrary to international standards.

Participants highlighted that the public expression of faith is increasingly **challenged** in both secularized communities and communities with dominant religious traditions and that migrants, in particular, face majoritarian and secular blindness to their needs from both governments and the wider community.

Participants anticipate that, across much of the world, the above factors will continue to form major **challenges** for the churches in the coming eight years.

Day 2 ended with a ceremony of placing lights on a world map of countries of concern to participants.

On day 3, Katherine Cash presented a framework of 15 tactics for promoting FoRB,² falling within four areas: emergency tactics for responding

² FoRB Learning Platform, “Session 6: Inspired by Stories – Empowered by Tactics” in The Local Changemakers Course. <https://www.forb-learning.org/courses/changemakers>

to acute threats; change tactics for long-term system change; building tactics for the development of a “culture” of human rights; and healing tactics for restoring justice and dignity to those affected by violations. Information about concrete tools for practitioners was shared, in particular, the Local Changemakers Course,³ a resource for grassroots-level awareness-raising and mobilization. Participants shared experiences of using the tactics and these resources. They identified both the need for contextualized strategies and significant common challenges in terms of a lack of preparedness within the churches (a lack of knowledge, acceptance, skills, and strategies). The strategic role seminaries could play in preparing church leaders to promote FoRB and respond to FoRB violations was discussed, as was the need for global fora for learning and experience exchange for practitioners.

On day 4, Benjamin Kamine, representing the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, briefly greeted the conversation members and highlighted the need to have inter-faith conversations to engage with FoRB violations.

Affirmations

- We affirm that human dignity will remain an empty promise without the protection of all human rights. We affirm that human dignity cannot be realized without freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief (FoRB) and that FoRB, as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent standards, is indispensable to safeguard human rights.
- We affirm the importance of assuring that FoRB is addressed as an integral part of human rights, linked at every level with other rights, and that attempts to undermine human rights broadly undermine the basis of FoRB. We affirm that women and children have an equal right to FoRB.
- We affirm that freedom and safety for people of any faith are dependent upon the realization of FoRB for all and on positive relationships between people of all faiths and none. We affirm the importance of interfaith dialogue and collaboration in work to instil the values of FoRB for all.
- We acknowledge that there can be power imbalances in the exercise of FoRB and that necessarily broad legal rights should be exercised responsibly. We affirm the importance of the prohibition of coercion (as interpreted in General Comment 22 of the Human Rights Committee) in relation to matters of religion. We encourage all WCC members to make use of the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World.”

³ FoRB Learning Platform, The Local Changemakers Course. <https://www.forb-learning.org/courses/changemakers/>

- We affirm the calling of the church to build societies based on justice and reconciliation and the integral role of building FoRB for all in doing so. We acknowledge the role of the FORB Learning Platform as a key partner to the ecumenical conversation during the 11th Assembly of the WCC and encourage the member churches and the WCC to work with such initiatives and other partners to build capacity and convene spaces for experience exchange and learning.

Challenges

In addition to grave challenges in our external environment, churches face challenges within:

- Halting the instrumentalization of religion and religious leaders for political ends
- Recognizing the ways in which Christians have been and are complicit in violations of the rights of others and tackling ongoing problems in this regard
- Tackling discriminatory norms and practices related to caste, gender, and religion, including in religious family laws

Furthermore, the WCC and member churches, together with interfaith and civil society partners, face challenges in effectively responding to violations and promoting human rights in general and FoRB in particular, including the needs:

- To strengthen work in the sphere of FoRB at all levels, developing and implementing practical and coherent approaches to promoting FoRB, including:
 - Building preparedness to prevent and respond to acute situations more effectively
 - Advocacy and campaigning for changes to law, policy, and practice
 - Building a culture of FoRB for all through awareness raising, skills development, mobilization, and the development of broad networks for coordinated action
 - Restoring the dignity of those affected by documenting violations, seeking justice, providing material and psychosocial support, and providing space for commemoration.
 - To develop theological reflections on FoRB that can be communicated at all levels —particularly the grassroots level – and ensure that curricula for training church leaders include theological, rights-based, and practical knowledge and skills, preparing leaders to recognize and respond to violations and promote FoRB for all.

- To enable church schools to access and use teaching materials on FoRB for all.
- To develop methods for use in the WCC's programmatic work, such as contextual Bible studies, intergenerational conversation, and safe-space methodology, in order to deepen spiritual understanding and relevance in the task of promoting FoRB for all.

EC 16 TOGETHER TOWARD RACIAL JUSTICE: CONFRONTING AND DISMANTLING THE ENDURING LEGACY OF SLAVERY AND COLONIALISM IN A TIME OF INCREASING POPULISM AND XENOPHOBIA

Description

This abstract reflects synergy with the assembly document, “Confronting Racism and Xenophobia, Overcoming Discrimination, Ensuring Belonging.”

In the past decade, the world has witnessed multiple cases of racially motivated killings, violence, and discriminations in many countries. The digital revolution has emboldened racists as well as exposed their crimes. What we are witnessing is testimony to the enduring legacy of ideas, cultures, structures, and systems that the European imperial powers formulated, especially the construction of “races” to categorize different groups of people. These ideas justified and sustained slavery and, later, colonization.

Unfortunately, the abolition of slavery and the political defeat of colonialism did not signal the end of these ideas. These divisive and dividing ideas, structures, and systems adapted themselves to the new environment; hence the legacy of slavery and colonialism continued in the post-enslavement and post-colonial eras in many communities that were once enslaved and/or colonized. It will not be possible to overcome racism, xenophobia, and related discriminations unless we acknowledge their historical connectedness with slavery and colonialism. Further, the path to racial justice demands that the legacies of slavery and colonialism be unmasked to expose the continued influence of structures and systems that were developed to promote racism and xenophobia. The rise of extremist political groupings that thrive on hate speech, especially targeted at migrants – especially African, Asian, East European, Latino, Caribbean, African-Americans, Afropeans, and never targeted at Caucasian migrants – has emboldened racists and xenophobes.

Some churches have been complicit with racist and xenophobic ideas, cultures, structures, and systems in the past and, sadly, at present as well. However, some churches have always stood for the image of God in all human beings and have resisted and undermined these racist and xenophobic structures and systems. How can today’s churches continue the legacy of resisting, fighting, and combatting racism, xenophobia, and related discriminations?

The group in this conversation was, from a global view, well presented. It consisted of approximately 40 participants and was divided into five regional groups. There were four meetings where participants interacted on the issue of

racism. Every meeting was structured within the framework of clear guidelines and had the elements of inputs given by resource persons, discussion in different groups, and feedback.

Report of the proceedings

Expected outcomes

Participants have:

1. assessed together the realities and implications of racism, xenophobia, and related discriminations
2. discussed theological challenges and affirmations vital for addressing the past, present, and future of racial justice
3. identified main areas and approaches for ecumenical cooperation
4. agreed on challenges and affirmations for ecumenical work on overcoming racism, xenophobia, and related discriminations

From 1910 to 1939, the ecumenical movement identified racism as one of the major threats to human relations. From 1948 to 1968, the WCC also named racism as against the essence of the Christian faith. This ultimately led to the Programme to Combat Racism, which was created in 1968 at the 4th Assembly of the WCC. From that time, there have been consistent efforts by the WCC to challenge racism. Following several consultations, in 1975, the 5th WCC Assembly in 1975 declared racism a sin.

Racism – which is a human creation and a sin against God and humanity – is a Christian heresy. It is multi-layered and multi-faceted. It exists in all parts of the world and is an extremely destructive force. It has become even more salient in recent years and manifests itself in different ways.

Racism is closely linked to other discriminatory inequities such as casteism, white supremacy, xenophobia, Afrophobia, colonialism, and antisemitism. Racism and xenophobia intersect with discrimination based on ethnicity, national origin, religion, economic status, gender, disability, and other factors to create a system of intolerance that makes it impossible for some people and communities to have access to the basic rights that guarantee all people their dignity as human beings created in the Image of God.

Racism is personal, structural, and systemic; however, in all parts of the world, some people continue to deny the existence of racism – including within our churches. This denial of racism is particularly prevalent among people of white European descent, who are among the beneficiaries of a racist capitalist system.

Our biblical hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and relationship with God are all negatively influenced by racism, and at times our theologies and biblical interpretations have been used to justify racial inequalities. For some, their image of God is influenced by a white imagination; this sometimes prevents

white people, in particular, from realizing the full *imago Dei* in people who are Indigenous and racialized.

Structural and systemic racism is a sad, painful, and traumatic reality being manifested in our churches – globally and locally. It is a theological and spiritual issue that needs to be addressed in seminaries, universities, and churches. Historically, the church has been complicit in racial injustice; churches, though, have also shown resistance to racism.

In everyday life, we are painfully reminded of our colonial past by the legacy of slavery and racism. Statues, monuments, and other memorabilia of our colonial past are prominent features in our church buildings and open spaces. We have to deal with this in some way that is not honouring a destructive period of our humanity.

Statements, practices, and policies are often made without important regard for the history and present injuries of inequity, inequality, and celebration of diversity, without a strong commitment to eradicate racism. Without this kind of accountability, any accountability, movements, businesses, and institutions that prosper with impunity because of their involvement in racism are allowed to proceed with their activities. There are still many institutions that prosper because of the benefits that came from their involvement and promotion of the slavery of African peoples and injuries put upon Indigenous Peoples. The realities of a racist capitalist system persist; the WCC is called to consider how this is going to be addressed.

To address racism, xenophobia, and other ills of discrimination, we must address them in our preaching, teaching, and dialogue with others with ground rules that invite meaningful and candid conversations and tangible actions for change. At the same time, space and time must be made available and explored for education on the injustices of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. The church must sharpen its public witnessing, speaking truth to power in order to deconstruct the evils of discrimination in our fraternities and society. We as churches must commit ourselves to deep introspection of what our missionary involvement in colonization was.

Churches and seminaries need to develop curricula committed to anti-racist theology, spirituality, and pastoral care, in order to prepare, support, and nourish leaders, teachers, and congregations on the long journey towards racial justice and to encourage them to active and concrete engagement.

Affirmations

The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Karlsruhe, Germany, began gathering on the International Day of People of African Descent on 31 August and met until 8 September 2022. This ecumenical conversation, therefore:

Affirms categorically racism as a sin against God and humanity and a Christian theological heresy.

Recognizes the synergies between the consensus of people from member churches in this ecumenical conversation and the statement prepared for the assembly, titled “Confronting Racism and Xenophobia, Overcoming Discrimination, Entering Belonging.”

Strongly affirms the positive actions being taken by some ecumenical partners, states, and some churches – including historic Black churches in the US who were created to resist racism by establishing their own ecclesiological and theological anti-racist legacies – to acknowledge historical complicity in systemic racism, to dismantle systemic racism and encourages the WCC and its member churches to take similar actions.

Churches are *invited* to consider that it is a life-long process of transformation to an anti-racist way of life.

Encourages this ecumenical body to revisit the complicity, complacency, and support of religious bodies in the painful past of enslavement, colonialism, their legacies, and their current expressions in order to faithfully journey towards confession, *metanoia*, reparations, restorative justice, reconciliation, and healing.

Encourages the WCC to create an ecumenical anti-racism network, to focus on issues related to the ongoing trauma of racism, xenophobia and related discriminations, statelessness, advocacy, and equality and dignity of all people; such a network could be called the Collective for Anti-Racist Ecumenism (CARE).

Challenges and *calls* on the WCC, its member churches, ecumenical partners, and theological institutions to become more aware and educated on how the abomination of racism shows up in our preaching, teaching, Christian education curricula, Bible readings and study, liturgies, worship, and discipleship, and to adopt anti-racist attitudes, actions, theology, spirituality, pastoral care, and mandatory curricula.

Churches must *recognize* and *acknowledge* their own historic complicity and legacies – including their missiological efforts – as well as their current complacency with racial injustices. The WCC, its member churches, and its ecumenical partners are all, therefore, strongly encouraged to engage with racism audits on their current policies and practices.

Urges member churches, ecumenical partners, faith leaders, and all people of good will to confront racism, casteism, ethnic cleansing, occasions of genocide, xenophobia, and related forms of discrimination in churches and societies, and therefore engage with policymakers and leaders, as well as to speak against the institutionalization of racism and other forms of discrimination as they are inserted in theologies, literature, language, art, music, film, folklore, social, and public media.

Awareness of, and education about, whiteness, white supremacy, and white privilege and their manifestations in our churches is essential. White people must also be moved from attitudes and/or tactics like defensiveness, denial, guilt, and shame toward a place of individual and communal social responsibility.

Invites member churches and ecumenical partners to advocate for inclusive citizenship.

Strongly encourage the ecumenical movement to raise its voices against those who benefit from and profit from all forms of racism, casteism, discrimination, and xenophobia, those who acquiesce to it by their silence or inaction, and those who do not notice this as a need.

Exhorts member churches in the ecumenical family to become passionate advocates to help ensure that the inherent dignity and equality of all people are not compromised by institutions or harmful theologies.

Challenges:

The WCC, its member churches, and its ecumenical partners are requested to address these challenges:

Racism – a human-created social construct that has profited societies, including our churches – is not only systemic and structural, but it is also internalized, personal, and psychological.

The persistent denial of the existence of racism and the prevalence of this denial in many places, including within our churches.

The toxic intersections of racism, casteism, and xenophobia with other forms of discrimination and oppression in all parts of the world.

The issue of cultural misappropriation, which is a form of racism. For example, our churches could confront the uninformed and disrespectful use of Black Spiritual songs and liturgies in predominantly white contexts without awareness and education of the painful historical backgrounds.

Dangerous racist hate speech and actions in the media and on social media that are linked to nationalism and populism. The assembly statement “New and Emerging Technologies, Ethical Challenges” could be one resource for this.

Systemic racism persists in areas such as health, climate, pandemics, conflicts, education, housing, poverty, the dominion of land, and statelessness; this results in inequities. One related challenge is generational and inherited wealth that differs along racial lines.

There is little accountability in terms of benefits accrued from the legacies of slavery and colonialism. The WCC, its member churches, and its partners must wrestle with the manifestations of equity, reparations, and healing.

White defensiveness, white diversion, white supremacy, white fragility, casteism, and xenophobia have not been fully addressed in our churches.

Colonial and missionary legacies impact on present practices. Decolonizing theologies, education, practices, and policies can be one way of working towards accountability, justice, reconciliation, and unity.

The prevalent imageries of a white Jesus and a white God are circulating in our churches. These false doctrines need to be confronted and addressed.

The veneration and celebration of statues, monuments, flags, and other memorabilia from our colonial past are current sources of pain. We need to find ways to both remember and lament these aspects of our histories so that we do not repeat racist behaviours of the past – and so that we continue the call for transformation.

Micro-aggressions, racial harassment, and other harmful practices that promote woundedness persist at WCC gatherings. Safe spaces matter, and the Code of Conduct is a welcome resource. Additional methodologies and practices are needed that will confront racism and related discriminations at its gatherings and that would create policies and practices that hold aggressors to account for their behaviours and actions.

EC 17 EXILE, EXODUS, AND HOSPITALITY: HUMAN MOBILITY, DISPLACEMENT, AND THE PUBLIC ROLE AND WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

Description

Migration and/or human mobility in its varied forms not only pose specific challenges concerning human rights: it calls into question the ongoing mission and prophetic role of the church. This ecumenical conversation will explore the tensions and intersections between human rights and the Christian faith and the churches' pastoral, prophetic, and public role. The ecumenical conversation will explore the changing and extremely diverse profiles of people on the move, the challenges migration raises, and the many ways migrants transform ecclesial life, mission, and praxis. As migration is likely to become increasingly complex in the years to come, this conversation will consider how and why it is necessary for churches to continue to be strong witnesses and advocates in the public sphere as well as address current, emerging, and future migration challenges.

Report of the proceedings

This ecumenical conversation about human movement and how the church might respond to those who are moving, particularly those who are in need of protection and assistance, including but not only refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people, was framed by an introduction to the key terms that are used in this field of discussion (See appendix).

The role of the church in responding to migration was a key question for each session of this ecumenical conversation, with input from speakers who have lived experience of offering hospitality and pastoral care to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

From Ethiopia, we heard about how the church has sought to respond compassionately to people on the move from third countries who are fleeing conflict and government mismanagement, internally displaced people escaping conflict in Ethiopia, and helping to integrate refugees into the Ethiopian community. In Ethiopia, churches are key to responding to refugees, providing practical and pastoral support. They have a long history of this, beginning with freedom fighter refugees in the 60s, and have continued to welcome different groups of refugees ever since. The churches are often able to provide support before the government or other NGOs arrive. They are seen as being neutral and impartial, which makes them trusted.

The recent history in the Czech Republic has seen a difference between the public reaction to refugees from the war in Syria and the war in Ukraine. This reflects attitudes from politicians and debate that happens in the public square. Opposition to Syrian refugees is connected to racism and Islamophobia, with many Czechs having had little exposure to Islam. Churches in the Czech Republic spoke out about the misuse of Christian values in politics and released statements against racism and xenophobia. In 1991 they supported Kurdish refugees, preaching and praying publicly, which is important for the gospel witness to welcoming refugees. Churches, along with *diakonia* organizations, published concrete recommendations about how to accept refugees. The church wrote to the government asking them to accept more refugees, saying, “We can help manage a welcome to the refugees.”

The Church of England is seeking to respond to people-trafficking and people on the move by developing resources that help people encounter the stories of people forcibly on the move and who become trapped in exploitative situations so that those participating are moved to compassion and action. It is important that refugees are allowed to tell their own stories and that bridges are built between those in countries receiving refugees and refugees so that an “us and them” situation is avoided.

We also heard about work being done to equip people to recognize and respond to people who are trafficked, building on the wide range of networks the church has across the country. This is important because when you are in a country not your own, it is very hard to know what your rights are, so it is hard to avoid being exploited.

From Finland, we heard of a ministry with refugees and asylum seekers where refugees were given agency to build and develop the shape of the pastoral and practical ministry, including helping to support the ministry financially, along with the Finnish Church. Those best placed to provide care and guidance to refugees are those who have navigated the system themselves and so can best understand the system and what people are going through. In this way, the church became a trusted provider of services and welcome, often preferred and trusted over services provided by the state.

Since 2009, Pacific church leaders realized that climate justice would not be achieved soon enough to prevent the need to relocate those whose land would become uninhabitable. They developed a program of accompaniment, working with those facing relocation, their traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and the government to support communities in deciding whether to relocate or not. When relocation happens, the church accompanies the community through the process, supporting them with practical and pastoral care, weeping when they weep, sharing their suffering, developing rituals to support relocation, and theological reflection. They also support those who choose not to relocate. For people of the Pacific Islands, to leave their home is to leave the care of the land and culture entrusted to them by their ancestors.

It is to choose between cultural identity and safety. Theologically, they have reflected on how Pacific Islanders who are forced to relocate can sing the Lord's song in a strange land where their relocation allows the story of culture and land to survive.

Refugee ministry in the United Methodist Church in the USA encourages local churches to practice a ministry of welcome locally, seeking to meet with refugees and migrants in their own local community and developing programs that respond to the actual needs refugees have locally. When it works well, this ministry is existential, formational, transformational. That is, it helps people know who they are as God's people, how they live for God's reign, and changes the church.

The sharing of these stories is important because it reminds us again that when talking about migration and refugee policy, we are discussing real people who bear the image of God.

Alongside stories of ministry and mission with and for refugees, the ecumenical conversation discussed the role of the church in the public square and the theological themes that shape the church's understanding of both its ministry with refugees and its public witness.

Common themes that emerged from speakers and participants in the ecumenical conversation were:

- The inequality of how refugees are received: the legal status they have, and what support they are provided was noted with concern. We noted that Ukrainian refugees had been received in a very different way to refugees from Africa and the Middle East. We heard a similar story of people on the move from Venezuela arriving in Trinidad and Tobago. The church has an important role in advocating for the equality of all refugees, affirming the dignity of each person made in the image of God, regardless of country of origin or religious practice.
- Concerns were expressed that some government responses are becoming increasingly unwelcoming of refugees, with some using an appeal to Christian identity and nationalism to create an unwelcoming environment for refugees. The church must be at the forefront of resisting the use of Christian identity by politicians to create a hostile environment for refugees.
- We learn from each other. The capacity to learn from how other churches, *diakonia* agencies, and humanitarian- and development organizations plan and implement ministry with migrants and refugees strengthens migrant ministry. In each session of this ecumenical conversation, people spoke of how they had learnt from others as they developed their ministry, and there was learning in the conversations themselves. The need to support the capacity to

- learn from each other needs an organized and sustained way if the church and its agencies are to offer best-practice migrant ministry.
- Migration invites us to reflect on Christian mission, evangelism, and ecclesiology. Migration *diakonia* means we serve in place those who come, rather than seeing mission and evangelism as taking the gospel to other places. Those countries that have sent missionaries in the past are now receiving people from countries they missionized and are being evangelized by migrants and refugees, and disruptive communities are emerging beyond traditional churches and ecclesiology.
 - The Bible is a book of migration. Exodus is a key theme across scripture. God was the people of Israel's God when they were strangers in Egypt when they were in exodus and exile. The prophets call us to a radical welcome of the stranger. Jesus was a refugee, and the earliest disciples migrated to share the gospel. This pattern of Christians being on the move to live out their discipleship is seen throughout Christian history. Our commitment to God means we are committed to the radical welcome of strangers because God has welcomed us into the very heart of God's love. The church is always on the move towards the margins where we meet God.

In the course of this conversation, we reflected on ministries of *diakonia*, the witness of the church in the public square and our own radical welcome of the stranger; the witness of this conversation is that these three need to be held together for an authentic Christian response to migration.

Affirmations

The church has a crucial role to play in welcoming migrants from wherever they come, offering hospitality, pastoral care, and practical support. These efforts are often enhanced when churches work ecumenically to provide this support.

The witness of prayer and preaching is important both in helping the church reflect on why we provide a ministry of hospitality and in witnessing to the wider society in regard to the dignity of all people and the priority of hospitality towards strangers in our midst.

The diversity of places that churches offer ministry, from urban to rural, in schools, *diakonia*, and other organizations, and institutions means it is well placed to recognize signs that people are trapped in modern slavery and respond appropriately. In order to do this, churches need to develop resources and training.

Challenges

The work of confronting racism and xenophobia is crucial to create a climate of welcome for people on the move. We encourage churches to continue to challenge racism in their own lives and to speak out strongly against xenophobia, Islamophobia, and extreme nationalism in their countries.

There is great value in being able to learn from the different ways churches and *diakonia* organizations develop ministry and mission for and with refugees and migrants. We urge the WCC to work with established organizations (e.g., regional ecumenical bodies, humanitarian- and development organizations, and other relevant organizations) and re-establish the Global Ecumenical Network on Migrations to support the development of best practice migrant and refugee ministry across the worldwide church. This network needs to include people on the move.

The church needs to fully welcome migrants and refugees, no matter which country or region they come from and must advocate for governments to also fully welcome people on the move and ensure they have all their rights respected regardless of their origins.

We encourage the WCC to reflect on the implications of ministry with and by migrants for its theological work on mission, evangelism, and ecclesiology. In particular, we encourage the WCC to include migrants and refugees in the ongoing development of mission, evangelism, ecclesiology, public witness, and *diakonia*.

Appendix

Definitions

A migrant is any person who has left their country and is now residing in a country other than their country of birth.

The definition of a refugee is given in the legal framework of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Refugees are a subset of migrants who have been displaced by conflict and are receiving international protection from a state other than their own.

Asylum seekers are those who are seeking recognition as a refugee. While some countries have processes for status determination, not all countries do (in such cases, status is determined either by UNHCR or asylum seekers are absorbed into the population of undocumented migrants, having to fend for themselves).

Internally displaced people (IDPs) are those fleeing conflict or disasters who cannot stay in their homes but cannot cross their border into a third country, and so are displaced in their home country.

Stateless people are those who have lost (or have never been able to establish) their identity as citizens of their country.

The Palermo Protocol defines trafficking in persons as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

The definition of modern slavery encompasses slavery, human trafficking, servitude, forced or compulsory labour.

It is important to note that all people on the move – whether they are refugees, migrants, IDPs, or others – may become subject to trafficking through no fault of their own. This often happens in the context of being forced to move without documents using clandestine pathways and/or as a result of false visas and work permits being used in exploitative working arrangements.

EC 18 INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND SOLIDARITY

Description

The crisis brought on by COVID-19 has heightened awareness of our shared vulnerability on one side and reminded us of the scandalous gap between the rich and the poor, between the privileged and the underprivileged, on the other side. However, we rejoice that Christians, as well as people of all faiths and goodwill, are collaborating to construct a culture of compassion and interreligious solidarity, reaching out to the needy and the vulnerable with material, psychological, and spiritual assistance at the individual as well as institutional level. Additionally, we also witness how interreligious relationships became a powerful means of expressing and building solidarity and of opening ourselves to resources coming to us from beyond our limitations during the crisis. In light of this, different religious communities are inspired and sustained by the common humanity we find in our respective traditions.

Report of the proceedings

Overview

An ecumenically diverse group of approximately 35 people participated, joined by interfaith guests.

The conversation was organized into four thematic sessions:

1. Why interreligious solidarity?: Our rationale and inspiration
2. WCC-PCID text: *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity*
3. What guides us?: Stepping stones and stumbling blocks for interreligious solidarity
4. Where do we go from here, and how?: On future vision and action

Each session provided an opportunity for presentations on the theme, focusing on the theological and practical dimensions of interreligious solidarity. All participants were invited to offer responses and to share input and contextual experiences. As both presenters and respondents, interfaith guests shared wisdom and insight, modelling the methodology of interreligious solidarity through their engagement in the process.

Session 1: Why interreligious solidarity?: Our rationale and inspiration

The first session began with a substantial time of introduction and contextual sharing, building the relational foundation for the ecumenical conversation to unfold.

The first presentation was offered by Prof. Benjamin Kamine, a professor and PhD student at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. He offered a Jewish perspective on interreligious solidarity, drawing on the Rabbinic tradition. He emphasized the importance of the *ger*, who is “the person who is not from here but living among us.” For Jews, this emphasis is not only directed outward but recalls the Jewish experience of being strangers in the land of Egypt. In this way, the struggle of the Jewish people is linked to the struggle of every other community. To forget this memory is to not only forsake others made in the image of God but to forget an essential spiritual and practical dimension of Jewish identity and practice.

In describing Jewish solidarity with the stranger, Prof. Kamine recalled the statement of Maimonides that in every generation, one must not only think of themselves as having left Egypt but must behave towards others as though they were once strangers themselves. The commemoration of the exodus from Egypt re-enacted annually in the Passover Seder is thus an invitation for all the hungry to come to eat. In speaking of the Syrian refugee crisis, the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said that he used to think that the most important commandment in the Bible was to “love your neighbour as yourself,” but he realized that, in fact, the most important is to “love the *stranger* as yourself.” As Jews anticipate the holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, they are waiting to be judged by God. Prof. Kamine explained that the *Mishnah* describes two categories of transgression; against God and against other humans. He concluded by saying that standing before God requires that one first seek forgiveness for transgressions against others as the basis for right relationships and the possibility for interreligious solidarity.

Following the presentation, participants were invited to respond by sharing in response to the question, “What does interreligious solidarity mean for you?” Responses included:

- Sharing together, being together, listening to one another in a spirit of harmony, love, and compassion
- Understanding and embracing the pain of the wounds of the other as an act of radical compassion
- Living the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which means to embrace the image of God in its totality
- Responding to human needs in the case of natural disasters or public health crises with equity and without regard for religious identities

The moderator closed the session by underscoring how interreligious relationships, discourses, and dialogues are crucial for us all because “there is no *Oikoumene* outside of interreligious contexts.” Prof. Tamer encouraged participants to anticipate the next day’s focus on the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. When Jesus asks us to consider who our neighbour is,

he reminds us that it is the one who acts with mercy through acts of solidarity. Christ calls his disciples to do likewise.

Session 2: WCC-PCID Text: Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity

The session began with the introduction of special guests, including several professors and Prof. Dr Azza Karam, general secretary of Religions for Peace International.

The Rev. Dr Peniel Jesudason Rufus, former WCC executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation and Fr Paulin Batawira, undersecretary of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican, gave a presentation to introduce the text, *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity*, co-published in 2020. Though the document took shape in 2019, the pandemic created a need to concretize the idea of interreligious solidarity in response to the crisis of COVID-19. The adaptation of the text was timely, and the publication was picked up by major media outlets as a relevant faith-based response.

The form of the document invites readers to see, reflect, and act; to see the crisis as an opportunity for solidarity, to reflect on scripture and theology, and to act together to alleviate suffering. By acknowledging the pandemics within the pandemic of COVID-19, such as racism and gender-based violence, the document is attentive to the experience of the grassroots. The text challenges the Christian urge to always see ourselves as the Samaritan and instead calls for Christians to consider how we are called to be interreligious innkeepers who provide care and hospitality in an ongoing way. The presenters encouraged participants to see interreligious solidarity not as an emergency-room triage, but as a prophylactic, like a vaccination that protects against suffering and strife.

Prof. Dr Karam was invited to offer a response to the text. She affirmed its relevance for Christians in multi-religious and secular contexts. She underscored that all humans are born to serve, with reciprocity between those who give and receive, as those who give are also on the receiving end. In the context of Religions for Peace, she insisted that there is no logic in thinking that only one religious community can heal the world. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted all religious communities, and religious institutions served as first responders to the crisis in many contexts. The problem, however, was the lack of coordination and interreligious solidarity in responding to COVID and even an increase in territorialism. She challenged the ecumenical participants to consider the vital need to work together in solidarity with interreligious partners during COVID-19 and beyond.

Participants were invited to join in the discussion. Responses affirmed the value of the text and its call to Christians to work in interreligious solidarity to serve the world. Examples from the COVID-19 pandemic were shared, as well

as missed opportunities. One example of each is the resilience of new forms of cyber ministry and interreligious dialogue as a way to protect public health, but also the failure of houses of worship to receive migrants in some contexts when they were closed. It was acknowledged that there are times when interreligious solidarity requires religious communities to “break or bend rules” in order to provide for people’s needs or to protect their well-being and rights.

The moderator closed the session by encouraging participants to imagine new ways of thinking about and doing interreligious solidarity based on what we have learned during COVID-19 and in anticipation of future opportunities to serve a wounded world with our interreligious partners. As we consider a new future, rather than return to what was before the COVID pandemic, we are challenged to consider how interreligious solidarity can be a central expression of the life of the churches in a multi-religious world.

Session 3: What guides us?: Stepping stones and stumbling blocks for interreligious solidarity

The session began with the introduction and presentations of Dalia Al Mokdad from the Adyan Foundation in Lebanon, who is Muslim, and Rev. Jacklevyn Frits Manuputty, general secretary of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (CCI).

Ms Al Mokdad described the complicated situation in Lebanon and the sectarianism that is rampant. In light of this, she described a selective form of interreligious solidarity that is restricted to the social realm. The Adyan Foundation is working to ensure a deeper, more authentic interreligious solidarity to counter this. Examples of this work include partnering to provide more inclusive religious education than what is offered in the current school curriculum and partnering with media to ensure a stronger, broader, more accurate narrative that uplifts positive examples and stories of interreligious solidarity. She underscored that interreligious solidarity requires partnerships, which need to be inclusive.

Dr Manuputty shared about the interreligious peacebuilding work he engaged in his own post-conflict context of Indonesia. In 2011, he led the mobilization of an interreligious movement of youth, the “peace provocateurs.” Even in its name, the movement seeks to remind every person that they have a seed of peace planted by God in their soul that never fades away. Participants are equipped to embrace peace so that they can directly influence the transformation of conflict. One of the realities this effort acknowledges is that “throwing theology” at conflict can exacerbate tensions. Instead, they looked for common ground through the identification of common challenges. In this intentional process, trust and friendships were formed. Two examples of effective initiatives are the interfaith host family stays, bridging people on either side of the conflict as a way of humanizing the situation, and pastors

and imams working in dialogue to explore a shared social problem and then delivering the same sermon in their churches and mosques.

Both presenters spoke about how to bring awareness to biases and stereotypes, the need for effective leadership to see both new possibilities and where not to push, and the importance of trusting the process. They also identified the ways in which interreligious solidarity is an important preventative measure, as well as a means for addressing conflict and building social cohesion. The document “Belonging, Affirmations for Faith Leaders,” on the issue of statelessness published by the WCC (CCIA), was noted as a good example of a theological and practical document that serves as a resource for interreligious solidarity. The rapporteur led the group in an initial conversation about possible recommendations from this ecumenical conversation, which are reflected in the affirmations and challenges below.

Session 4: Where Do We Go from Here and How?: On Future Vision and Action

Affirmations

- Acting in authentic interreligious solidarity is a faithful response to the gift of Christ’s love. In Christian discipleship, we are called to partner with people of other religions and worldviews as God moves the world to reconciliation and unity. Interreligious relationships, dialogues, discourses, and initiatives are a necessity as we engage the multi-religious reality of the *Oikoumene*, the whole inhabited earth.
- We recognize that the well-being of the Christian community is dependent on the well-being of all, both neighbours and strangers. Interreligious solidarity is both a means for – and an outcome of – living into God’s intentions of abundant life for all people and the planet.
- We respect and value other religious communities, their beliefs, practices and approaches to solidarity; we are encouraged to reinvolve the principle of treating others as you would like to be treated.
- As in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christians are called to join others who are on the ground doing this work, engaging together to provide ongoing care, protection, and hospitality for the wounded stranger. We are also challenged not always to assert ourselves as hosts but to receive opportunities to be guests.
- Interreligious solidarity in times of crisis is a way of ensuring that all are served in this wounded world. Institutional cooperation across religious lines in response to disaster is urgently needed.

- Resiliency and agility are key characteristics for effective and meaningful interreligious solidarity that seeks true healing of this wounded world rather than simply treatment of its wounds.
- Partnerships are at the heart of interreligious solidarity. Creating and maintaining trust is a prerequisite to, and an ongoing need for, interreligious solidarity.

Recommendations related to these affirmations:

- The WCC is encouraged to continue projects that foster theological reflection on contextuality and interreligious solidarity.
- The WCC is encouraged to strengthen and expand its interreligious partnerships in all areas of its work, acknowledging the transversal nature of the Programme for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation.
- The WCC is encouraged to consider how interreligious solidarity can send a clear message to political actors to stop misusing and abusing religious theologies, communities, and leaders for political ends.
- The member churches of the WCC are encouraged to identify concrete ways to foster, strengthen, and uplift forms of interreligious solidarity and to share best practices with the WCC.

Challenges

- Forgetting or forsaking the (shared) scriptural commandment to love the stranger; the failure to live out the inter-connectedness of our communities, together with creation
- Seeing interreligious solidarity as separate from, competing with, and even counter to ecumenical commitments
- Interreligious dialogue of the head that is disconnected from a dialogue of the heart – and also the heels
- Sectarianism, fundamentalism, extremism, and dangerous ideas that take hold in parts of all traditions, including Christianity. Related to this is the reality of “taboo” issues that can disrupt efforts toward interreligious solidarity
- An exclusive understanding of religious truth
- The lack of interreligious cooperation in times of disaster response; the tendency of institutions to “go it alone” rather than partner with others
- The improper insistence that we need to agree on all things in order to engage in interreligious solidarity. Dialogue cannot be a prerequisite to service

- The urge to return to “pre-pandemic” habits, which have often neglected opportunities for interreligious solidarity, rather than to embrace a new future of interreligious solidarity that serves a wounded world

EC 19 THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION – WHY ITS ECUMENICITY IS ESSENTIAL

Description

Theological education is a key concern of the ecumenical movement. It provides a vital space for constructive theological reflection in the midst of changing ecclesial and social landscapes. Ecumenical theological education fosters vitality and sustainability of the shared life and witness of churches. The churches should therefore commit to teaching theology ecumenically.

In view of inward-looking tendencies, ecumenical theological education calls upon churches to reflect jointly and profoundly on the nature and mission of the church in the world. In view of stark economic and epistemological imbalances, ecumenical theological education provides critical and constructive analyses of the intersection of faith, politics, and culture. The need to decolonize theological education is obvious for many theological institutions and public universities, especially in the global south. Additionally, a historical accounting for non-western expressions of Christian faith as it affects Christian practice requires attention. The shifting epicentre of Christianity towards the Global South increased awareness of the diverse nature of Christianity and led to the emergence of World Christianity as an academic field. How does the teaching of ecumenism account for non-western expressions of Christian faith, and how does it intersect with the study of World Christianity? What epistemological shifts does the local context in its intersections with World Christianity entail? What role do interreligious studies play within that? What are the implications of these questions for teaching ecumenism and teaching ecumenically?

The ecumenical conversation will discuss the opportunities and challenges that arise from the current setting, with particular reference to how methodologies, epistemologies, curriculum development, and institutional frameworks could strengthen the ecumenical dimension of theological education today.

Report of the proceedings

The theme and central question for the first day was, “What understanding of theology and of ecumenicity guides theological education?” The two resource persons, Rev. Dr Carlos Ham (Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba) Reformed, Caribbean, and Prof. Dr Esther Mombo (Anglican Church of Kenya) offered their wisdom.

Dr Ham emphasizes the importance of doing theology as the reflection of a critical communitarian dialogue between the Biblical faith and the experience of our context, which is communicated to the world. This interaction of text

and context needs to work together with the social sciences in learning from the context more deeply. There is also an urgency to pursue theological formation towards a wider ecumenical commitment and participation “glocally” *vis-à-vis* the trending denominational or sectarian formation. Ecumenical cooperation for theological education facilitates the exchange of ideas and experiences, e.g., hybrid (online/physical) learning, as an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Mombo locates ecumenicity and theology in the prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17:21-23. Jesus’ prayer brings to the fore the aspect of oneness as an underpinning of ecumenism and the image of unity and diversity in the body of believers. Theology should be inclusive, interdisciplinary, issue-based, non-hierarchical, and anchored in mentorship. Such conversations produce ecumenical, diversified, and contextualized education that is relevant and moves away from theologies of self-isolation, self-preservation, and irrelevant “package” theologies. Three methods of doing it are to analyze, judge, and act.

During the conversation, the participants discussed the question in small groups and reported their insights in the plenary. The difficulties between doing theology as an academic exercise – and thus forming theologians – and ministry-focused education that forms pastors were highlighted. The different focus influences the theological institutions in their curriculums. Theological education institutions also need to work on social justice issues, *diakonia*, all is done in ecumenical formation, as early as possible. Ecumenicity can be achieved by introducing other churches’ history and traditions, the exchange of resources, and the formation of ecumenical leaders for the future.

Dr Ham closed the meeting with a prayer, asking God for guidance to build capacities ecumenically, encouraging critical thinking among the people of God, to seek transformation according to the values of God’s reign of justice, peace, the integrity of creation, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The theme and central question for the second day was what effect do historical legacies of imported traditions in churches have on theological education? Two resource persons shared their wisdom: Rev. Dr Fundiswa Kobo (University of South Africa) and Rev. Dr Binsar Pakpahan (Huria Kristen Batak Protestan).

Dr Kobo acknowledges the legacy of colonialization in South African theology and that the current curriculum is still perpetuating it. We need a decolonizing theology and to listen to Indigenous knowledge and interpretation. Theology should have an epistemological foundation that listens to the voices from the periphery and those who are oppressed. Theological education should be dialogical and pluriversal. The methodology Dr Kobo raises is “see, judge, and act.”

Dr Pakpahan mentions that Indonesia has different theological legacies that divide churches into a variety of traditions. These differences added to the richness of Indonesia’s islands, local tribes, and geographical locations, have contributed to the differences between churches. However, government

accreditation regulation has encouraged theological institutions to work together and exchange resources, learn from other traditions, and seriously consider their curriculum in order to fulfil the accreditation process.

During the conversation, the participants raised the issue of the remnants of colonialism in the current curriculum in many theological institutions. There is also a recognition of difficulties in discerning contextual theology and historical legacies of the colonial past. The participants realized the need for academic publications or exchange of materials. Meanwhile, participants from former colonial countries recognize the need to learn contextual theologies from other countries.

Prof. von Sinner closed the meeting with a prayer, thanking God and hoping for more conversation, and cherishing the gifts of teaching from God that strengthen and challenge us in our faith and in our vocation as educators. “We ask God, who are the past, the present, and the future, to guide, illuminate, edify, and grant us wisdom on our pilgrimage,” he concluded.

On the third day, the central question was, in what ways would the ecumenicity of theological education today inform academic development and institutional frameworks? The presenters were Rev. Prof. Rudolf von Sinner (Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil (IECLB)) and Rev. Prof. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Methodist Church Ghana).

Prof. von Sinner indicates that a decolonial view is needed in seeking “hermeneutical fairness” and “epistemological justice” by looking, for instance, at the old Indigenous stories told and retold – usually orally – in their resonance and dissonance with Christian theology from which the latter can learn in telling the Earth’s story. The new way of looking at theology is developed under the heading of “epistemologies of the South” by Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, which is about the attention towards the knowledge and wisdom in the founding stories and resistance of those who suffer injustice, oppression, and colonialism. Until now, voices of the Global South are still underrepresented. We should challenge our curricula as we head for a decolonial and truly ecumenical theological training. The WCC and especially the Ecumenical theological education (ETE) and the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, as well as the Network of Institutions of Higher Ecumenical Theological Education (NIHETE) conceived by the outgoing Commission on Ecumenical Education and Formation (EEF) commission, could be a formidable hub for the exchange of epistemologies, methodologies, curricula, and institutional frameworks from all over the world that could inspire our own reformulations of theological education and formation.

Dr Asamoah-Gyadu mentions that the term World Christianity stands as a constant reminder of the inclusive character of Christianity, highlighting its catholicity. World Christianity has to be redefined while remembering that denominationalism, race-specific theologies, and ethnic-based Christian communities are human constructs. Dr Asamoah-Gyadu thinks that the

teaching of “African Christianity” in terms of mission history and ecclesiology would be better served with the integration of prophetic ministry as part of the curriculum because prophetic ministry has always been at the heart of Christian religious innovation in Africa. Independent Indigenous Pentecostal/charismatic theology is still not in the syllabus, whether in mission studies, systematic theology, or even in church history. A shift must occur in view of the idea of World Christianity.

In the conversation, the participants contributed their insights into the main question of the day. Theological methodologies should include both personal and academic. Personal understanding of what theology is comes from the relationship and encounter one has with another through prayers, reading the Bible, meditation, and mystical elements of it. Meanwhile, academics’ formation of what theology is comes from an attempt to answer what religion is to the society. Both methodologies need each other. The participants also acknowledge that theological educations and the different methodologies are a product of the past. In the World Christianity, there is no single true methodology for understanding God’s revelation. We should be more open towards other traditions and contexts to discern what the truth is.

Affirmations

1. Theological education is an essential space for strengthening ecumenicity since it calls the churches to overcome suffering, discrimination, and exclusion in order to foster reconciliation and unity through exegesis and hermeneutics of the Bible, the Christian faith, and the context.
2. Ecumenical formation within theological education is essential in preparing an inclusive church leadership and the younger generation by embodying ecumenicity through exchange, mutual learning, and spiritual enrichment. Ecumenical formation happens by means of personal encounters between Christians from different traditions, by sharing their faith stories, building trust, and facilitating friendships.
3. Theological institutions are called to introduce ecumenical education in their curricula by including the diverse and rich histories of different church traditions within their contexts and engaging in fruitful discussions with other theological institutions, universities, and religious communities. Eastern churches are encouraged to share their insights on our common heritage of the Ancient Church with Christianity worldwide and develop mutual exchange.
4. Ecumenical formation includes learning with and from fellow students and faculties from diverse church traditions and contexts.

This enables life-transforming experiences, as examples in the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey and GETI (Global Ecumenical Theological Institute) show.

5. Theological institutions are encouraged to provide academic, ministry, and lay training in a local and global context by providing adequate and accessible teaching materials in view of new developments in World Christianity.
6. Teaching materials, syllabi, and field experiences can be meaningfully exchanged through the NIHETE network and Christian world communions.
7. Ecumenical theological education leads to capacity building for *diakonia*, uniting people for service as a concrete expression of God's mission.
8. There is a recognition of the need for interdisciplinary contextual theology to overcome colonial and neo-colonial practices in church, society, and theology.
9. Theological institutions are encouraged to identify and critically engage colonialism and develop their contextual theologies by trying to find their own voice by discerning theology with different methodologies.
10. Theological institutions are encouraged to share the student's and faculties' rich experiences, practices, and reflections in dealing with the ecological crisis.

Challenges

1. Theological institutions are challenged to pursue ecumenical theological education in situations of increasing self-isolation and fundamentalism.
2. Churches and theological institutions need to recognize and learn from different theological traditions, their history, and contexts through interdisciplinary study. Furthermore, ecumenical theological education encourages dialogue with the sciences and humanities.
3. There is a deficiency of ecumenical education or ecumenical exposure to theological education due to the lack of intention, resources, or encounters with people from other traditions.
4. There is a call for common standards in curricula for ecumenical education, some institutions introduced them early on, but others have not. The WCC could facilitate such a process.
5. It is a challenge for many theological institutions to ensure the quality and freedom of education and research through adequate accreditation systems.

6. Theological institutions are facing challenges in providing inclusive education, especially for people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

EC 20 MINDING THE GAPS: A GENDER JUSTICE APPROACH TO RECONCILIATION AND UNITY

Description

As Christians, we believe that women and men are made equally in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and that the community of the baptized are equal participants in the Body of Christ. The church is a community of pilgrimage towards full deployment and realization of *imago Dei* in each one of us. For that reason, the imperative to act on gender justice concerns and guidelines is an integral part of our theologies, history, and mission of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Given the current realities of COVID-19 and climate crises, increased digitization and xenophobic nationalism, however, there is an ever-widening gap in access and participation between men and women. Such a gap is a deterrent to the unity of the church and the reconciliation we seek among all people and can be understood as violence.

The ecumenical conversation examined the intersectionality of gender justice issues, informed by the experience of Women of Faith Pilgrimages of Justice and Peace, the Gender Justice Principles, and strategies proposed by the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women and Men (DCSW) 20th-anniversary consultation report. The conversation also addressed the divisive gaps between theology and praxis, which threaten gender equity and equality and perpetuate sexual and gender-based violence in church and society. The ecumenical conversation affirmed that the church, called to be a prophetic sign of God's reign in today's world and in its witness, must address the inequalities present in the global community.

Report of the proceedings

In the first session, participants identified the key elements of intersectionality and reflected on the nature of barriers to reconciliation and unity. We reminded ourselves of the major documents and processes which came out of the assembly in Busan in 2013, in addition to projects and pilgrimages throughout this period.

Gender justice principles are critical to addressing a system built on colonial and patriarchal understandings of power, acknowledging that there is still an intrinsic power controlling knowledge, bodies, and territories. Grounding our gender justice work in faith and theology is paramount. Together, we can move from reflection to transformational action at every level inside our churches and faith-based organizations (FBOs), which recognize our interconnected struggles for justice.

The Gender Justice principle, “Pillars of Justice”, acknowledges that “since its inception, the WCC has stood against racism, sexism, ageism, economic inequalities, ecological degradation, and other injustices,” adding through “Points of Intersectionality” that all these harms “intersect, complicate, and multiply injustice”. Economic injustice has been pointed out as one of the keys to gender inequalities, and from economic injustice stems other difficulties such as displacement, issues of land access, subordination, xenophobia, and racism.

As violence against women is increasingly reported, gender-based violence is used as a weapon of war. Trauma is transferred to the next generation when it is not addressed or transformed. From the report of DCSW and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, churches are required to discern deliberately between culture and gospel when it comes to stereotyping and discriminating against women. Women with disabilities and young women should be considered the most vulnerable in conflicts.

The economy has significantly influenced gender-based violence, which has always played an essential role in defining our roles and status within society. Unjust relationships and life in the community often stem from the egoistic accumulation of money for a few. The monetary system we live in today governs and, in many cases, directs our lives, desires, and how we relate to each other. One of the consequences of this “earthly god” (wealth) has been the subordination of people to each other and, consequently, the subordination of women. Christ expressed the problem in these words, “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

Naming the ever-present reality of racial violence and the recent rise in xenophobic nationalism, discussions recognized that work for gender justice must take account of attitudes and structures of racism and the legacies of colonialism and their effects on the relationships among women, as well as those between women and men. Participants reflected on how fear of difference has been transmuted into systems of domination. They acknowledged that racism, ableism, sexism, classism, ageism, and other systems of oppression intersect, complicate, and multiply injustice. Recognizing that scripture and tradition have been used to justify oppression, exclusion, and violence, participants asked, as we prepare to continue building gender-just communities post-Karlsruhe, how do people of faith now name and transform systemic racism, its relationship to gender-based violence, and the attitudes and theologies that reinforce it within our faith communities?

From discussions, emerging concerns identified sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) strategies as always reactive and not proactive. Raising young boys and girls with the intention of equality is a proactive strategy to break cyclical violence. It was emphasized that a mindset change is a preventive

strategy employing attitude changes; men and women can tackle SGBV together.

In Session 2, participants began to critique the root of the problem from a socio-historical and theological framework, calling for the understanding that reconciliation implies brokenness in church and society.

Stories from around the world continue to highlight multiple ways that injustice continues in social, economic, interpersonal, and ecclesial relations. Conditions of life and status of women in church and society remain a space of pain and struggle. Participants addressed the inequities created by the global market economy, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. They also examined the continuing challenges for women's participation within the church, including resistance to women's leadership, failure to attend to gender justice in theological education, and a retreat from language that includes, and theology that reflects women's experience. Living into a vision of equity and equality requires the transformation of the structures of gender injustice in church and society that continue to create barriers to reconciliation and unity.

Participants clearly named the culture of silence and impunity around violence against women, leading to a failure to acknowledge individual and collective risk and the need for support and protection. The importance of engaging youth in discussions of toxic masculinity and femininity was acknowledged; they bring positive and creative voices into discussions of gender justice. Another barrier named is the close link between militarism and violence against women. Crimes committed against women during armed conflict should be thoroughly investigated and addressed. Peace-making and solidarity by and with women across the world are critical to reconciliation. All work addressing violence also needs to take into account the misinterpretation of biblical texts, biased theologies, and abuses of authority that contribute to the normalization of gender-based violence.

From discussions, emerging concerns covered cultural barriers as obstacles to combating SGBV. There was a clear gap between the implementation of solutions to theoretical plans. Discussions focused on the inclusion of victims and survivors in planning and discussions are necessary. The dire need to break the violence of silence through male advocacy in challenging unjust structures was a second prominent theme. Finally, a need to increase funding for gender advocacy to expand pastoral care of the church beyond conversation to aid with legal fees and the care of victims, survivors, and children.

In Session 3, the *imago Dei* was the theological framework for addressing gender justice and SGBV. The core texts interrogated were:

- God freely created human beings in his image and likeness. (Genesis 1:26).
- The living image of God has been Christ, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Col 1:13-15).

- In Christ, we find the fullness of humanity; because Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human (Chalcedonian Creed, 451AD).
- Being the image of God, Christ inspired and set us free from enslavement to human structures so that we may “be perfect” (Matthew 5:48).
- The church is the Body of Christ, and for that reason, it cannot be a space of pain and struggle, a supporter of structural violence that strips “*imago Dei*” from people.
- The church must be the community in motion allowing full deployment and realization of *imago Dei*, generating signs of God’s reign beyond injustice, inequality, and discrimination.

Additionally, participants outlined justice as a constitutive element of the church’s identity. Emphasizing that God’s love creates the space for justice to unfold, the church’s responsibility is to discern how a just and equal community will take shape, embrace differences, and address inequalities. Participants reaffirmed that this responsibility means creating structures and environments that allow human beings to flourish. It means addressing hierarchical structures that create subordination and perpetuate silence on all types of violence, especially SGBV.

From discussions, emerging concerns implored for more gender sensitivity in all bodies, not exclusive to gender-focused departments, and the mainstreaming and implementation of a gender lens across the board. Finally, participants unanimously agreed upon securing accountability by establishing a permanent gender reference group.

Ecumenical affirmations, challenges, and recommendations

Theologies

Affirmation: Christian communities must inspire people to live theological principles of equality and equity in their daily lives. We affirm the emergence of and ask for the further harnessing of life-affirming theological principles that contribute to the transformation of social conditions that offer new actions, thus ensuring gender justice practices.

Challenge: Biblical texts or theologies are, at times, used to justify privilege, oppression, or violence.

Recommendations:

- Build on life-giving, life-affirming, and dignifying theologies over those theologies that legitimize misconceptions of women and devalue their God-given dignity (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)
- Adopt ‘transformational humanities’ as an alternate paradigm (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)

Education

Affirmation: Theological education contributes to the formation of church leaders, enabling them to draw on knowledge of gender issues, intersectional analysis, and critical interpretation of tradition.

Challenge: Institutions responsible for theological education, at times, may be complicit in disseminating oppressive and violating theologies and may not include or may lack gender equality theology, gender-just curricula, and gender-just hermeneutics. Barriers to education for women may continue to remain a challenge.

Recommendations:

- Partner with theological institutions to mainstream gender-just curricula and hermeneutics, with the periodic review of said curricula (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)
- Urge leadership development training and mentoring programmes, along with strengthening their capacities for resilience, for young girls and women (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)
- Urge gender-justice mentoring and accompaniment programmes for young boys and men (for member churches and ecumenical partners)
- Urge gender-sensitization and intersectional analysis training for church/ecumenical leadership (for member churches)

Affirmations and Challenges

Affirmation: Gender Justice Principles and Strategies for Implementation affirm the need for equitable representation in staffing and governing bodies of the WCC.

Challenge: In relation to the participation of women in our churches, representation in all structures of the WCC continues to be significantly limited.

Recommendations:

- Institutionalize gender balances, preferably in the form of quotas, for appropriate representation (for WCC)
- Provide enabling environments for the full participation of women (not just being present, but fully participating) (for WCC)

Resources

Affirmation: The JCWM programme has given important leadership and resource to the work of gender justice in WCC programmes, member churches and in relating to gender justice initiatives in ecumenical organizations and civil society bodies such as the UN.

Challenge: Each WCC programme needs adequate attention and financial resources to integrate gender justice into their work

Recommendations:

- establishing a Permanent Reference Group on the JCWM programme (for WCC)
- ensure that programme units have gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation tools, and set budgets and allocations for gender justice (for WCC)
- allocate adequate human resources and funds to the WCC programme desk for gender (for WCC)
- use a gender lens in monitoring and institutional accountability mechanisms (for WCC)
- monitor the WCC publications for gender balance in authorship (for WCC)

Networks

Affirmation: There is great value in working in networks of collaboration and cooperation, ecumenical and interfaith, related in horizontals or verticals.

Challenge: The work of gender justice needs strong allies and connections among regions as well as among WCC, member churches, and ecumenical organizations.

Recommendations:

- recognize and appoint champions/ambassadors for anti-SGBV efforts (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)
- build links between gender desks and theological desks within churches and the WCC, and ecumenical partners (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)
- strengthen connections with regional networks, share best practices, and receive feedback (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)
- explore creative ways for intergenerational networking and mutual enrichment (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)

Violence

Affirmation: Globally, one in three women has faced sexual or gender-based violence. Stories of the pain and trauma of sexual and gender-based violence in church and society, and also stories of courage, resilience, and solidarity as people join to resist and end the sin of SGBV, were shared.

Challenge: The exacerbation of all ‘-isms’ with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shadow pandemic of SGBV.

Recommendations:

- break the violence of silence about SGBV, create the right environments, and transform structures that discourage silence, to end SGBV (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)

- ensure programme work takes into account the intersectionality of SGBV with vulnerabilities of poverty, racism, economic exploitation, the ecological crisis, displacement, and militarism (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)
- develop a similar Ecumenical Initiative as the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative and Advocacy (EHAIA) to end SGBV and support survivors of SGBV (for WCC, in cooperation with councils of churches and ecumenical partners)
 - advocating for anti-SGBV legislation and holding perpetrators accountable
 - funding for legal fees, child care, trauma support and counselling, and medical treatment
 - collaborate with other WCC programmes and bodies to address and process the impact of trauma within our communities for healing and transformation
 - develop and roll out education programmes for Sunday school, youth groups, and marital counselling programmes
 - support the churches to create safe spaces and collaborate with specialized NGOs for trauma healing and empower women as trauma healers, and where they exist, referring to national justice mechanisms
 - incorporate the Thursdays in Black campaign, and learn and cooperate with parallel campaigns
- acknowledge and take ownership of Thursdays in Black as central to the campaign for ending violence against women (for member churches)
- examine their own structures and practices in relation to SGBV, including abuse by clergy (for member churches)
- counter narratives of objectification or commodification of women's bodies that cheapen women's dignity (for member churches, WCC, and ecumenical partners)
- accompany perpetrators for the transformation of toxic gender norms while also maintaining the principle of 'do no harm' to prevent any possibility of re-traumatization of victims, with gender-just pastoral care that always focuses on the safety of the victim (for member churches)

EC 21 CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Description

The history of the World Council of Churches (WCC) is closely connected with the history of modern international human rights law, starting with the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948.

However, in many parts of the world today, the legitimacy of the principles and obligations expressed in international human rights law are being undermined and attacked as never before. Moreover, there is an increasingly evident diversity of perspectives within the ecumenical movement on the relationship between Christian faith principles and international human rights law.

Drawing on the outcomes of a prior process of reflections, consultations, and publications (2020-2022), this ecumenical conversation will explore this issue from a range of theological and regional or cultural perspectives and in light of the experiences of victims of human rights violations (both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights).

Report of the proceedings

It should be stated from the outset that this ecumenical conversation (as were several others) was beset by practical difficulties regarding its meeting space resulting in a risk that the outcome was of lesser quality than might have otherwise been the case. Care must be taken in planning future WCC events so that such does not occur again, particularly in respect of the sensitive personal testimony on topics such as that covered by this ecumenical conversation.

The conversation was grounded in the testimony of those with personal experience of human rights violations and was supported by the outcomes of the *Strengthening Christian Perspectives on Human Dignity and Human Rights: Perspectives from an international consultative process* conference in Wuppertal, input from Ibrahim Salama, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jochen Motte, United Evangelical Mission, and the long and rich history of WCC engagement in human rights issues. Frank Chikane, moderator of CCIA, and Victoria Strang, Human Rights Watch, served as resource persons.

Furthermore, this conversation had a particular interest in the intersection between faith and human rights and the implications both for Christian discipleship and for communities in their wholeness when human rights are violated.

This ecumenical conversation had the following objectives:

1. Reflection on current challenges to human dignity and human rights in light of the assembly theme (Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity) and in light of declining support for multilateralism, the rule of law, civil society space, and protection of human rights defenders.
2. Recollection and re-examination of the historical associations of the WCC and the ecumenical movement with the development of modern international human rights law.
3. Presentation of different perspectives from within the ecumenical movement on the relationship between Christian faith principles and international human rights law, exploring important divergences on this issue.

The first three sessions of conversation opened by listening to the victims of human rights violations, moving on to two sessions titled "Recalling our history, exploring our differences." Victim testimony was presented through in-person presentations and videos produced by Human Rights Watch. Session 2 included a recorded keynote presentation from Dr Katerina Kunter (University of Helsinki), "History of ecumenical engagement in the development of international human rights law."

Jochen Motte introduced the results of a study process and recommendations from more than 50 theologians and experts conducted by the World Council of Churches, the Evangelical Church in Germany, and the United Evangelical Mission with an ecumenical conference in Wuppertal, Germany, in April 2022 on "Strengthening Christian Perspectives on Human Dignity and Human Rights."

Ibrahim Salama emphasized that there is a shift in interest by the UN from high-level statements about human rights to grassroots experience, with an interest in individual and community stories. He referenced how human rights were born as a concept long before formal statements were made and that faith communities can be credited with this historic respect for human dignity. It is helpful to the work of the UN for the churches of the world to be interested in human rights law and related issues.

Victoria Strang spoke about how Human Rights Watch has worked with faith partners in respect of monitoring and advocating against the detention of migrants in Canada facing detention in provincial prisons alongside convicted persons. Particular issues include the separation of families and the absence of legal provisions about the length of time a migrant person can be held in custody. Such a custodial experience, as well as being fundamentally unjust, aggravates other issues, such as ongoing trauma for those who have experienced persecution, mental health, and disabilities. The Canadian Council of Churches

is a partner of Human Rights Watch in raising awareness of this situation, about which few Canadian residents are aware.

Frank Chikane reflected on how neither the Bible nor theology are needed to explain why someone should not be tortured, arising from his own experience of torture on five occasions between the ages of 27 and 35 by fellow Christians. How can churches respond to the reality that Christian people perpetrate torture against other Christian people? This input further called out the double standard that torture, e.g. in Europe, is not tolerated; however, in practice, people in other parts of the world may perpetrate torture with apparent impunity and without the world seeming to care, e.g. in Palestine and Papua. This is aggravated by power structures that enable some to be treated as less than human and deep-rooted related issues concerning poverty and race.

The ecumenical conversation heard about human rights violations in the Philippines, in some cases against the church itself. The brutal campaign against drugs has resulted in the killing of thousands of people, including extra-judicial killings. Campaigns seeking to suppress environmental activism have resulted in the displacement and harassment of indigenous people. There have been systematic attacks on the rights of people classified as enemies of the state alongside a weaponization of the law resulting in trumped-up charges being made against individuals. Two examples of this from the Iglesia Filipina Independiente are the experiences of Bishop Morales, who has been incarcerated for ten months following trumped-up charges of possession of explosives, and of Aldeem Yanez, a former youth leader, who is at present jailed because of other trumped-up charges. Churches offering humanitarian aid to their communities, e.g. education and food programmes, have had their ministries closed down by the government.

In Africa, human rights law is viewed with suspicion in many places because those who propounded the Universal Declaration on Human Rights were supporters of apartheid in South Africa. Furthermore, human rights law is seen in parts of Africa as a tool that has been used by some countries to control others. The language of human rights in the churches is not strong because any link between the secular language of human rights has not been associated with the language of theology, church, and discipleship. Human dignity is strongly referenced however, the notion of human rights is not. Younger people in Africa take human rights very seriously, recognizing their universal character. In addition to this, there is a balance in many African countries between traditional legal codes that have developed over many centuries and generations and the Roman legal codes inherited from colonial times. This can be challenging for proponents of universal human rights as traditional values sometimes differ, and can seem and feel imposed by local communities.

Colonialism has had a substantial impact on human rights development in Africa and other parts of the global south. The same countries that colonized Africa are now the same ones demanding the imposition of democracy, human

rights, and other values perceived as Western. Many of the same people who monitor human rights violations through NGOs are the same people whose countries violated colonized people. In World War I, Africans and African-Americans were forced into the war, fighting for freedom but whose freedom was freedom promised then later denied. “You said you were fighting for freedom”.

The issue of the double standard was raised multiple times within the conversation concerning places where there is an advantage to some parts of the world for lesser or no human rights standards to be in place for the benefit of those nations who, while promoting such ideals, benefit from the violation of people in other parts of the world.

Language is a significant issue in this area. Who defines the language of the public square in a time where it seems that secular language has the monopoly? If human rights law is to be truly universal, it must be demonstrated why this must be so from within the biblical and theological tradition. How do churches and other faith groups respond to the fear from some quarters in the secular world that a close relationship between the religious world and human rights law might cause a monopoly to arise on the part of the religious? On the other hand, can any single community or strand of human society claim a monopoly on human rights law and its interpretation and application precisely because of its universal character?

The conversation also heard perspectives from particular confessional groups. Within the Orthodox traditions, there is a diverse range of approaches to human rights law. The Orthodox tradition emphasizing human dignity offers a valuable starting point. Charles Malik, a Lebanese Orthodox Christian, was a contributor to the writing of the original declaration. The Orthodox view emphasizes how human rights are not a Western concept imposed on the rest of the world. The approach of the Orthodox traditions is shaped by work in advocacy and knowledge of human rights violations, e.g. Orthodox Christians in the United States had a close relationship with the Civil Rights movement. The theology is grounded in context and lived challenges. Human dignity is a cornerstone of the social ethos of the Orthodox churches. Dignity is the basis of peace, justice, and freedom and dignity is protected by human rights legislation. Where documents speak of dignity, there is a need for dialogue between church, world, and institutions.

The Peace Churches have a valuable contribution to offer here too. The churches of the Radical Reformation began as minority groups persecuted by Church and State. Human rights law is compatible with a Brethren understanding of peace and peacemaking; however, this is tempered as Rule of Law protections can be weakened by some understandings of how this is enforced, e.g. literal interpretations of an eye for an eye. The Brethren tradition raises helpful questions to develop our depth of understanding of these issues, for example, in terms of how do we understand the role of the UN and other

military peacekeepers? Peacekeeping for whom and for what? How do we know when peace is won?

There are significant issues with respect to enforcement (if that is itself a helpful term), of human rights law in respect of Christianity itself. Christianity has been understood in parts of the world as a tool of colonization with much associated distrust of the Church.

Affirmations

1. Affirms the importance of reclaiming the human rights vision for the church
2. Affirms the common ground between faith and secular understandings of human rights law
3. Contribute to the attainment of safe, inclusive, and violence-free faith communities, by preventing and responding to violence against women and children and other vulnerable groups using strategic, collaborative, and innovative approaches through religious leaders and faith communities
4. Commit to building a strong network in which people of all ages are safe and treated with dignity and respect
5. Welcomes working partnerships between church agencies, groups and organizations with other faith-based and secular partners raising awareness of human rights law and offering support to people and communities who have experienced violations of that law
6. Affirms the role of individual Christians, churches, other faith communities, and all organizations and people of good will who witness human rights violations and testify to what they have seen
7. Affirms the universal human dignity of all persons made in the image of God and the universal right of all people to have one's individual human rights respected
8. Affirm the indivisibility and universality of human rights and advocate for the victims of human rights violations as an integral part of the pilgrimage of justice and peace
9. Affirm and strengthen the capacity among church members through training and empowerment to actively engage in human rights advocacy.
10. Affirms the importance of the work and mission of CCIA and other WCC commissions and programmes that human rights be actively included in their work
11. Stresses the importance of pastoral, ecumenical, and solidarity visits to places where gross human rights violations have taken or are taking place, particularly where there are member churches present in that place

Challenges

1. That the member churches, commissions, and programmes of WCC, along with other national and regional ecumenical bodies, reacquaint themselves with the history of church involvement in Human Rights law and consider how they might raise their knowledge and awareness of the issue
2. That the WCC and its member churches consider their response to the testimony of human rights violations and torture perpetrated by Christian people against others, including fellow Christians, and stand against the misuse of power dynamics that enable such violations to occur
3. That the WCC and its member churches speak the truth and call out the double standards in play with respect to the enforcement of human rights law and commit to standing on the side of all people who find themselves victims of human rights violations
4. Creating spaces where conceptions of human dignity based on human rights and faith orientations are deliberated on for building peace and common understanding
5. Church leaders in all places and at all levels are challenged to consider how they might discuss and reference human rights in their work and teaching
6. Consideration should be given to how Human Rights law can be discussed in the churches and associated agencies and organizations
7. The WCC and member churches can challenge the idea that human rights law is only a secular notion that arose in the aftermath of World War II
8. WCC challenged to consider how human rights concerns intersect with each other, e.g., gender, children, Indigenous People, and other vulnerable people, environmental, food, justice, and land rights
9. The challenge when governments and other actors violate the human rights of individuals and communities in the name of their national interest
10. Churches are challenged to contribute to strengthening global systems of accountability with respect to human rights law and its enforcement

EC 22 CHURCHES AND MORAL DISCERNMENT: FACILITATING DIALOGUE TO BUILD *KOINONIA*

Description

As the ecumenical movement promotes the quest for reconciliation and unity, it encounters painful disagreements between churches. An important part of the work of ecumenical bodies is to engage with this pain of division and facilitate dialogue that opens avenues for constructive engagement. There have been intense debates within and between churches and church traditions because of disagreements on moral issues. These debates showed that the ecumenical conversation could not just focus on differences in moral positions as such but needs to understand more deeply the different approaches to morality and ways to engage in moral discernment processes in the churches. It is important to analyze different dimensions and aspects, theological and non-theological, involved in these debates.

In recent decades, the WCC Commission on Faith and Order has intensely studied these challenges and engaged in a new phase of study after the publication of the study document *Moral Discernment in the Churches* (2013). Since 2015, it engaged with the self-description of ecclesial discernment processes in different church traditions, and it analyzed historical examples of different kinds of changes. The study reveals that in order to comprehend changes in moral issues, not only moral norms but also different ecclesial self-understandings and structures need to be considered, as well as different views on continuity and change. As churches are confronted with new challenges, they enter into a discernment process in which, in light of the “conscience of the church,” they search for adequate responses that are faithful to the gospel. The new Faith and Order study documents *Churches and Moral Discernment. Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia*, which was approved by the Faith and Order Commission meeting in January 2021, provides a tool that helps to analyze and engage in such processes.

Report of the proceedings

The participants of this ecumenical conversation were engaged in four ninety-minute sessions of information and sustained dialogue on the topic of moral discernment. The participants took seriously their commitment to stay in one conversation for all four sessions.

The moderator, Dr Pascal Bataringaya, welcomed the participants for every session and introduced the leadership team, the resource persons, and the WCC staff member facilitating the ecumenical conversation.

The leadership and resource persons presented the study document and provided the framework of the study process, information on the status of the document, as well as the history of the engagement of WCC and the Commission on Faith and Order on the topic of moral discernment.

The facilitator, Prof. Dr Myriam Wijlens, informed the participants in detail about the new methodology and the reason it was followed. They were presented with the three volumes of the work and the contents of each volume. Subsequently, they were presented with the main topics. H.E. Metropolitan Dr Vassilios of Constantia and Ammochostos presented the notion of the *conscience of the church*, which immediately relates us to the eschatology, as the church challenges history and history challenges the church; then His Eminence presented the diagram and the logic behind its elements.

Following was the presentation of the *notion of change* by Prof. Dr Bernd Oberdorfer, which is understood in the framework as a commitment to a deep continuity to do the will of Christ in an ever-changing world.

Dr David Kirchhoffer presented the tool for understanding and analyzing the moral discernment processes proposed in the third volume of the study document, providing the participants with information on the elements of the tool and the modes of moral reasoning (intentions, actions, consequences). The participants were encouraged to read and try to use the tool in order to get familiar with the methodology.

After the presentations, the participants engaged in dialogue with the resource persons, providing feedback on the work and asking questions on the issue of the notion of change and the methodology behind the elements of the tool, the language in terms of semantic equivalences and the main insights of the study document. The participants were once again encouraged by the facilitator, Prof. Dr Myriam Wijlens, to read the publication and try to use the tool with several examples of different kinds of change, as well as different examples of change.

On the second day, the participants were given a demonstration of the tool using three historical case studies on the topic of usury. Subsequently, there was an interview-dialogue between the facilitator and H.E. Dr Mor Polycarpus Aydin, who had contributed to the first two volumes of the study and was called to respond to questions such as what did it really mean for him to reflect and describe the moral discernment process in his tradition? How does the “conscience of the church” resonate with his tradition? H.E. Dr Mor Polycarpus Aydin especially stressed the importance of language and storytelling through poetry in his tradition as a means to relate to the people and preserve continuity.

This was followed by a vivid discussion between the participants and the resource persons, where appreciation of the study document and the tool was evident. All were engaged in sustained, in-depth dialogue on critical issues

challenging the churches and the world today, especially on the third day of the ecumenical conversation.

More specifically, the participants were asked to provide their feedback and suggestions on the next steps for a global ecumenical dialogue on moral discernment. Some of the key points of the discussion were: further engagement of the Global South was proposed, as the methodology may be challenging; the wider use of the study document and the tool was suggested, as this will take the work to the next phase of churches using the document and providing feedback on the elements and the proposed methodology; more promotion and dissemination of the study seemed important, and the assembly was recognized as an ideal opportunity to provoke further engagement of the WCC community with the study work.

The tool was acknowledged to serve as an enabler for getting involved in a conversation on why we do hermeneutics one way instead of another and recognizing the ways how we move from understanding what is happening during moral discernment in order to do moral discernment well.

Contemporary issues such as secularization and the global refugee crisis were mentioned and suggested for future study, as a systematic approach may provide more insights and deepen the understanding in the moral discernment processes.

On the final day, the rapporteur presented the report, which was received and approved by the group.

It was noted that Chapter 1 and the common call to all Christians to be holy was a very important unifying part of the final study document. This also presents an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be holy in the face of contemporary ethical issues. Further affirmations were received from the group approving and praising the tool and how it can be practically used. It was pointed out that, from the perspective of experts in conflict resolution, this tool could be very useful in resolving conflicts in and between churches.

Each day, the rapporteur was harvesting the key points of the discussions, as well as affirmations and challenges to the WCC and the wider ecumenical movement.

Affirmations

1. The Faith and Order study document *Churches and Moral Discernment. Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia* offers insight into processes of moral discernment within a church, as well as between church members of the WCC.
2. We, therefore, affirm that the ongoing work of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order on the issue of moral discernment can be used in analyzing situations and issues of ethical nature, pursuing a more profound understanding of moral discernment

- processes and therefore facilitating dialogue between the members of the World Council of Churches.
3. We affirm that the purpose of the Faith and Order Commission, as well as of the study document, is not to resolve specific ethical issues but rather to facilitate a dialogue within and between traditions. This can be done by providing ways to understand what actually happens when a church is engaged in moral discernment processes.
 4. As the church is called to continue its ministry in a world that grows more and more complex, the need for understanding and dialogue within and between churches grows stronger. The study document can help each church recognize the moral discernment processes and face challenges with other churches as well as recognize and clarify its own self-understanding in regard to moral decision-making.
 5. We encourage the use of the study document and especially of the proposed tools, in international and national settings, in theological schools and seminaries and in local churches. Furthermore, we consider it to be especially useful in groups bringing together persons from different churches – including future bilateral dialogues.
 6. We encourage the use of the study document with practical application in bilateral dialogues and invite them to report to the Faith and Order Commission its insights and learnings.
 7. We strongly recommend that the Faith and Order Commission keeps the topic of moral discernment on its agenda.

Challenges

1. There are still many aspects of moral discernment that could be investigated. The group discussed some of them, such as the fact that the moral understanding of ethical issues is not in clear distinction to the dogmatic teaching of a church and the question as to why some moral issues are potentially church-dividing whereas others are not. From this flows a suggestion that it could be interesting to investigate how the tool can also be used or developed for dogmatic questions.
2. It might be interesting to examine similarities and differences between how secular institutions and churches engage in moral discernment.
3. We encourage the pursuit of more feedback from the use of the study document and the proposed tools.
4. We call the WCC to encourage its member churches to facilitate more translations of the document into local languages in order to widen its use.

5. Finally, following all the above, we ask the WCC to facilitate and organize more initiatives in the local churches to encourage and widen the use of the study document and especially the tools. This could include online workshops, tutorials, webinars and training sessions. We bring special attention to supporting more engagement of the global south.

EC 23 INSPIRED BY THE PILGRIMAGE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE – MOVING TOGETHER BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Description

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace was initiated by the WCC 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013 as the guiding and overarching thrust for the WCC's work until the 11th Assembly. Since then, the Pilgrimage has moved forward in close cooperation with regional and national ecumenical organizations and member churches in the focus region of each year. The ecumenical engagement with local contexts and the realities of peoples' struggles for life and human dignity has been done through Pilgrim Team Visits (PTVs) that were conducted as tangible expressions of solidarity and companionship. Reflecting on these experiences, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace Reference Group and Theological Study Group realized how people experience the impact of violence, structural injustice, and the climate crisis as threats to their communities and the physical basis of their lives. The emerging topics, truth and trauma, land and displacement, gender justice, racial justice, and health and healing, have become the backbone for the theological reflection conveyed in the document *Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Companionship*, which presents the themes as the fruit of listening to the stories and experiences of the people.

The objectives of the four ecumenical conversation sessions held at the 11th Assembly are:

- To learn about the journey of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and to engage with the lessons learned from Busan to Karlsruhe
- To reflect on own transformative journeys
- To develop ideas of how people and churches can engage in transformational action affirming peoples' lives and dignity as expressions of God's compassionate love in Christ
- To articulate constructive direction for future work of the WCC inspired by the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace
- To introduce a comprehensive ecumenical theology of companionship
- **To offer this report to the Programme Guidelines Committee to propose to the assembly.**

Report of the proceedings

The ecumenical conversation began with sharing key aspects of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, emphasizing the journeys and experiences with different communities, peoples, and contexts that were part of the Pilgrimage. The three

vias, celebrating the gifts (*via positiva*), visiting and touching the wounds (*via negativa*), and transforming the injustices (*via transformativa*), were stressed as key spiritual dimensions that gave content and helped to offer language and meaning to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and the different stations throughout the years. This journey was explored particularly through the lenses of the Reference Group and the Theological Study Group.

Advancing the methodology used by the Pilgrimage by listening, hearing, and understanding for deeper theological reflection now opens the way for wider participation in these ecumenical conversations. We examined the way of transformation by listening as we heard the gifts, challenges, and transformations for the healing of people, communities, and the world. While there are different biblical texts that have and could inspire the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the proposed text to reflect on during the conversation was Mark 8:34 “He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, ‘If any wish to come[a] after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’” (NIV).

On Companionship

What is exactly the meaning and depth of companionship? Companionship could be understood as a Christian responsibility, not just feelings of compassion and sympathy to work with others. The foundation of the notion of companionship is bigger. This larger framework of companionship could be supported by exploring more deeply the role and function of the Holy Spirit as companion. This requires a more detailed and deeper biblical and theological exploration to expand the meaning of companionship. Biblical texts, such as Philippians 2, could help stress the *kenotic* understanding involved in companionship.

Companionship means crossing the river that distances the self and the other – not to walk *for* the other but *with* the other – just as the Holy Spirit acts: the Spirit is *with* us. Seeking to transform injustices means a daily activity and to be active not only *for* but more fundamentally *with* others. Companionship can be continued even when we are physically apart; it can be expressed in *witnessing* and *advocating* on behalf of others. Another element is to consider companionship when your own life is at stake (when the risks are personal) – are you prepared to put your life at stake with the purpose of and as a result of walking *with* others?

Five Themes of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Following the five themes (truth and trauma, land and displacement, gender justice, racial justice, and health and healing) identified in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, smaller groups were formed to reflect deeper on each of them. However, it is important to remember that the themes are deeply interconnected.

The first session was oriented in terms of exploring the experiences of the participants and how their own journeys and backgrounds related to the different topics that were explored. On the second day, the focus for the groups was to revisit the document *Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Companionship*, paying special attention to their own topic. In the third session, the focus shifted one more time to consider the future of the Pilgrimage and the next potential steps in the life of the WCC. Finally, the fourth session gave the group the possibility to consider the overall report, emphasizing the affirmations, challenges, and recommendations.

In what follows, key aspects of each of the themes will be presented.

- **Truth and Trauma**

What is truth? Is there Truth? Is it possible and desirable to have a common truth? How to address “truth” when neutrality is not an option? Wounded have the right to tell “their truth”. There is no way to work through wounds when lies are told. Christ says: “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Christian life implies walking with those who suffer and are wounded. Truth-telling can begin the process of healing. To do so, it must reveal the root causes of conflict(s). If harm is not recognized by the aggressors, how can healing begin?

Often, when trauma experiences are shared, the story is so painful that it is too difficult to even begin talking about it. In the case of war, trauma is pervasive, in society, in the home and in the person. No one can truly comprehend the trauma. The embodiment of trauma must be acknowledged. Every traumatic context is different and must be honoured. This poses the question: how are the stories of trauma heard?

Theological and biblical affirmations of healing could be identified eschatologically. Revelations 21 and 22 could serve to comprehend and deepen this eschatological vision of healing.

- **Land and Displacement**

The root causes of displacement are interrelated and create many kinds of injustice. Some of the factors and dynamics that cause displacement include violence, war, and invasion; colonization, colonizing economic injustices, and corruption; climate change; poverty; financial exploitation by the rich countries (for instance, companies exploit land sources, making them uninhabitable for people); discrimination, and persecution of people based on their religion (for instance, the experience of Christian minorities).

Within this journey to reconnect to the land and to walk with those who have been displaced, churches have an important role to play. Churches can invite people to be companions on the journey of compassion, reconciliation, and just peace. They can act on the international level, offering public witness,

lobbying, and advocacy, contributing to democracy and accountability. Churches can strengthen the spirituality that supports faith instead of fear.

Christians need to unite, fight, and work for their faith rights and land rights. In this journey, it is key to connect to and hear stories of those who have been negatively affected by economic injustice. Churches should work with the government to fight against the violation of land rights. They can make ethical calls and encourage powerful countries to respect international law and to stop military invasions of smaller countries. Churches should reject the intolerance expressed in the destruction of cultural and religious places.

- **Gender Justice**

Gender justice is deeper than formal and legal rights for women. There are many forms of social, economic, and religious discrimination, even in societies with equal legal rights. Gender justice is linked to cultural traditions, and the relationship between genders is often an indicator of other relations and power structures in society. There is a backlash due to COVID and war that makes the work for gender justice more difficult.

Different interpretations of the Scripture about the role of women and men render huge cultural differences and theological interpretations. Some churches try to avoid discussions on gender rights to avoid disturbance within their own church and in the ecumenical fellowship. Scripture is both written and often understood contextually. Traditionally it has often been men who had the power to interpret holy texts. To understand the teachings of Jesus more fully, the insights of women are necessary.

It is crucial to highlight examples of societies where gender justice is more established, even if not fully; share the good stories, and analyze how this was achieved as an encouragement for others. Those women who experience a large degree of equal rights should also share their stories.

In terms of gender justice, we encourage churches to:

1. Share experiences on how gender affects the style of leadership in the churches. Are women given authority and positions (only) on the premises of men and traditional male leadership? How can the churches be enriched by using different ways of leadership? Are there differences in female and male styles of leadership, or is this just something we presume? We should share stories of good and sound leadership – both from men and women – and from different cultural contexts.
2. Churches need to raise the question of women's rights, even when this disturbs our theological understanding and church traditions. We also need to go beyond the recognition of rights because gender injustice continues in different ways, even in societies where the rights are formally in place. All forms of gender-based discrimination need to be addressed by the churches. The unity of the church can

never be an excuse for not raising difficult issues. As pilgrims, we are on our way, and together we are seeking new insights.

3. Give special care and attention to the interpretation of biblical texts to avoid misuse that can legitimize injustices. The Gospel liberates everyone – women and men – from dehumanizing traditions and practices, and we need to teach and preach so that this becomes the message.¹

- **Racism**

Racism is a construct: it is shared and experienced in different forms in different contexts. Yet some of the subjacent logics remain the same, especially that there is a constructed hierarchy of people. Racism is a mindset and a system that disturbs the recipient and the receiver (distorting the image of being created in the image of God). Centuries-long racist systems (ethnic, economic, political, and cultural) are very difficult to dismantle. There has been an “evolution” of or a trajectory set by racism: it has become subtle and sophisticated; it is expressed and experienced differently, which means that seeking racial justice is a constant struggle. Racial discrimination is a daily traumatic experience. When brought up, exposed, or confronted, it causes different defensive responses.

Churches have not always been on the “right side” regarding racism. It is important to consider confessions of guilt. Church is a microcosmos of society at large, which makes the struggle against daily-life racism a very important one also within the church. Even as we gathered in the assembly in Karlsruhe, there are realities of profiling and discrimination experienced by many in our midst. This becomes an urgent call to address the way we relate with one another in our meetings and how we advocate and train ourselves and others to confront everyday racism. As churches, we must remind ourselves of who we are as the image of God. It is a *kairos* moment because the church’s response to its calling to confront and dismantle racism seems to be fading. Churches should make public statements and actions. Racism is systemic, systematic, layered. The church cannot speak once and expect that it will all disappear. It must be a consistent message to the world: to stand against racism. This means that churches must engage in this on a day-to-day basis.

Intersectional approaches are needed. In addition to racial discrimination, there’s no access to land. These connections become clear, for instance, in black communities in Southern Africa, where there are many people who struggle to deal with their daily living. The struggle for women is “tripled layered”; racism, class, and gender discrimination.

¹ One member of the ecumenical conversation requested that this shall not be presented as a WCC policy, as it is not in compliance with the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

- **Health and Healing**

The struggle with poverty and health is closely related to the unequal system locally and globally. The pandemic has amplified unjust treatment, especially towards the poor and elderly people. The “vaccine apartheid” is racially motivated unequal access for marginalized people to vaccines and treatments. Many governments used the lockdown measure as a pretext to violate human rights. While some churches are engaging in the theological language that justifies the inequalities in terms of vaccine distribution, our experience from the pandemic is that many churches are called to find a new way for the ministry of healing.

There is an important biblical and theological connection between healing and liberation. Matthew 9:35-36 is an inspiring passage in this sense:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Considering this framework for healing, it is important for the WCC to: (1) affirm the problem of structural healing inequality that increases injustices and violence in relation to the pandemic. (2) Affirm that the pandemic has impacted the mental health of children and young people distinctively and stress how poverty and unemployment have increased child labour in the Global South; there is a form of “global apartheid” that could be seen in terms of “COVID apartheid” and “vaccine apartheid.” And (3) affirm that the pandemic has amplified the crisis on humanitarian response. The pandemic has been instrumentalized to undermine the rights and dignity of Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable communities, including refugees and migrants.

Affirmations

1. **We affirm that the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has proven to be very relevant and should be continued.** The Pilgrimage is not a specific program in the WCC but rather an overarching way of Christian life. The concept and methodology of pilgrimage is a way of relating to one another that leads to mutuality and transformation. Pilgrimage is a way of being in companionship, as Christians and as one humanity. We share our gifts and heal the wounds as we work together to transform injustices. The Pilgrimage is a revelation of Christ’s love moving the world to reconciliation and unity. On our pilgrimage, we experienced generosity and hospitably of friendship, but we were not primarily hosts and guests, but fellow human beings created in the same image of God. This gives hope for a

future where the many wounds and injustices in the world can be healed and transformed into justice for all. When we connect as pilgrims, we all are challenged, empowered, and transformed.

2. **There is a need to deepen the understanding of pilgrimage** with biblical and theological underpinnings so that it can be more accessible for the member churches, local congregations, and all people of good will. The document *Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Companionship* harvests the experiences and insights of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, organized by the WCC after the Busan assembly. This document can be an inspiration for member churches and individuals and should be, together with other documents and resources from the Reference Group and Theological Study Group, shared and studied by the member churches – and made available for others as well. The Pilgrimage may resonate differently in different contexts, depending on the theological, cultural, social, and political contexts, and this must be taken into consideration. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace’s dimensions: *via positiva* (celebrating the gifts), *via negativa* (visiting the wounds), and *via transformativa* (transforming injustices), have helped to explore differences and build companionship and unity in the midst of diversity.
3. **The method used and the themes identified in the** Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, organized by the WCC and identified in the international PTVs, gave the participants life-changing experiences. During the Pilgrimage, four themes were identified as crucial in all the countries visited: Truth and Trauma, Land and Displacement, Gender Justice, and Racism. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a fifth theme was added, Health and Healing. These themes should be prioritized in the work of the WCC in the coming years – in the context of climate emergency.²
4. The methodologies used in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, especially PTVs, can be developed further, and new experiences and insights can be added. The method can be used internationally but also in local communities. Pilgrimage is a movement, but you do not necessarily have to travel far away. PTVs can be carried out in many ways, also in local communities. We can build a “pilgrimage community” that can be transformative for different groups in different contexts. Together the pilgrims can transform the world.

² One member of the ecumenical conversation requested that this shall not be presented as a WCC policy, as it is not in compliance with the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Recommendation

- 1. We affirm that the Pilgrimage should be continued as an overall approach for the WCC fellowship.** The Pilgrimage is God's calling to us to express Christ's love to the world, and must be characterized by the following:
 - Companionship and inclusiveness
 - Respect for theological and cultural diversity
 - Awareness of power structures
 - Youth participation
 - Justice and peace
 - Healing and hope
 - Global and local perspectives
 - Structural, social, and personal transformation
 - Ecumenical and inter-faith cooperation
 - Decolonial approaches
2. During the Pilgrimage, five themes were identified as being globally relevant and crucial: Truth and Trauma, Land and Displacement, Gender Justice, Racism, and Health and Healing. **We recommend that these themes should be given priority in the work and life of the WCC in the coming years until the next Assembly in 2030 – in the context of climate emergency.**
3. We recommend that the WCC develops resources to be used by member churches. The WCC should facilitate networking and collection of experiences and "best practices" from different pilgrimages and broaden and deepen the continuation of the Pilgrimage.

The concept of pilgrimage incorporates companionship building on *Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Companionship* as well as previously prepared reports and documents. These resources can be inspirations for churches and local communities. Experiences gathered by the participant in the Reference Group and Theological Study Group are a resource for the WCC fellowship.

Some ideas for the continuation of the Pilgrimage include:

- Bible studies
- Website – sharing of "best practices", networking
- Practical guidelines for PTVs:
 - Online PTVs
 - PTVs – facilitators, workshops
 - Tool kit for congregations
 - PTVs between different traditions – visiting different local Christian congregations or other faith communities



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