



World Council of Churches

General Secretariat

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Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie
President and General Secretary
National Council of the Churches of Christ in
the USA

Hawaii Council of Churches

Geneva, 15 August 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we witness the catastrophic damage to the island of Maui and in particular to the historic town of Lahaina, and as we grieve the loss of nearly a hundred lives, perhaps many more, our hearts go out to you, leaders of the state's churches, to express our sorrow and solidarity in Christ Jesus.

Indeed, speaking for the worldwide fellowship of Christian churches gathered in the World Council of Churches, I offer our sincere condolences to you and to your congregations and to all the many people affected by these dramatically tragic events.

We first mourn the many people and families caught suddenly in the racing flames of this historic fire, fanned and fed by furious winds driving down from the hills to the sea. We grieve the incalculable loss of lives of people simply going about their daily activities and of their families, along with the thousands who still do not know the fate of those they love and cherish.

We also are mindful of the many brave rescue workers, first responders, volunteers, and churches, and we are grateful for those who have stepped into the breach to locate the victims and support the survivors.

And of course we see the devastation inflicted by the ferocious flames, incinerating houses and cars and the whole town of Lahaina. It will take years and years to rebuild what can, in fact, never be fully replaced.

Hawaii, and in particular Maui, is no ordinary place. An island paradise, it is also the seat of the ancient indigenous culture and the soul of Hawaiian indigenous religions. For many of us, it symbolizes the ageless indigenous quest for a creation spirituality that situates us with God and in God's great handiwork. In Lahaina, it also captures the encounters and clashes of cultures in the colonial period that forged the unique cultural identity of Hawaii today, including the life and witness of Christian churches there.

We must also admit that, even in faith, we do not have ready answers nor easy explanations or salves for this large-scale tragic loss. A natural disaster such as this poses huge questions to the unfathomable mystery in which we live and move. Still, we know that the God of Life is ever present and grieves with us. We know that God's love and compassion are limitless, embracing all

people and every hurt, ever replanting and renewing creation and always seeding and nurturing abundant life and well-being. We know that we Christians around the world, as stewards of God's good earth, must honestly take responsibility for addressing and mitigating climate change and its widespread effects.

As you begin to gauge the full extent of this tragedy and look to the long struggle ahead, including disaster relief efforts, please know that, across the whole fellowship — we Christians stand united with you in our firm faith in a loving God, our resurrection hope for new life in Christ, and our steadfast love for you and you the people you serve.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marianne Ejdersten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping tail.

Marianne Ejdersten
Acting General Secretary
(during the vacation period)