



World Council of Churches

General Secretariat

150 route de Ferney, PO Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
Phone: +41 22 791 6111 Fax: +41 22 791 0361
Email: infowcc@wcc-coe.org www.oikoumene.org

Direct phone: +41 22 791 6285
Direct e-mail: Beth.Godfrey@wcc-coe.org

Geneva, 13 September 2023

Common Greetings by WCC General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay and moderator Bishop Prof. Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm at the LWF Assembly, gathered in Krakow, Poland, 13 – 19 September 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is with great joy that I bring greetings from the WCC. I also speak in the name of our General Secretary Dr. Jerry Pillay who was eager to come himself. Due to unplanned circumstances, he had to cancel yesterday to his great regret. He is very much with us in spirit in these coming days.

Being part of the Lutheran family myself as moderator of WCC I am of course all the more happy to join you in coming together under a very promising theme. “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope,” this theme - and I am now referring here to the words Jerry Pillay wanted to say to you – “resonates deeply with the very essence of our shared journey and our ecumenical goal. This theme mirrors the message that reverberated throughout the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe – that our oneness is rooted in Christ’s love. In the WCC Assembly Unity Statement, together we strongly affirmed that “the love of Christ is the spiritual source of the ecumenical movement, that moves us to walk together, compels us to pray together, and urges us to respond to Christ’s invitation to be of one spirit and one mind.” Advancing an “ecumenism of the heart” rooted in the experience of Christ’s love, the Assembly called us to become disciples of this love, loving one another, transforming the world by love, each in our places and together as the body of Christ.”

And I add: We will of course need further theological exchange with other churches on concrete steps to further unity. But underneath that, we need a permanent conversion of the hearts towards taking Paul’s words on the one body seriously. We can never simply get used to the fact that we **speak** about the one body of Christ but we don’t **live** it as the church of Jesus Christ, still being separated at the Eucharistic table! How can we be a sign of unity for the world, how can we be salt of the earth and light of the **world**, if we don’t even live it **ourselves**?

We might have to overcome considerable obstacles in achieving mutual Eucharistic hospitality with other churches. But we can definitely already now **live** an ecumenism of the heart, which is firm in the conviction that **denominations** can **never** be the main basis of our identity, but can only be ways to newly discover our common Lord **Jesus Christ**. Let us always be aware of that, when we speak amongst ourselves and with others. As a fellow Lutheran, I can say that this is the only way to be true to Luther **himself**. For he never wanted to found a new church. But he wanted to rediscover **Christ** in a church that had moved **away** from Christ. Rediscovering Christ is not possible today without ecumenical exchange and ecumenical community in the body of Christ.

“This is all the more important in a time that urgently needs an authentic witness of the churches. Multiple threats – of accelerating climate change, COVID-19 and its impacts, conflicts, ethnic and gender-based violence, war, displacements, hunger and food insecurity, rising inequality and marginalization adds to the complexities and sufferings in the world... As many are listening to God’s voice in what you say and decide during this Assembly, may the Holy Spirit” – says Jerry Pillay – “accompany you to bring a vision of hope, encouragement, and inspiration to a suffering and broken world.”

I join him in calling us to “embark on this remarkable journey with hearts filled with joy, as we are reminded that Christ’s love is the binding force that compels us to become its vessels in working for a world that mirrors the divine plan for justice, reconciliation and unity.”

It is wonderful to be here and to represent the WCC. It is nurturing to experience the love of Christ in this community. It is a source of joy to feel in our hearts and souls the very truth of the headline of this assembly: **One Body, One Spirit, One Hope**”.



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



Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm
Moderator
WCC Central Committee