



# Making a difference in the world

The fellowship of churches in 2015



World Council  
of Churches

# The World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a fellowship of 345 churches present in more than 110 countries. As a global expression of the modern ecumenical movement, the WCC engages in a quest for common witness to the good news of Christ, visible unity in one faith, service to all the world's people, inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, theological formation, and spiritual renewal.

Within the membership are most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed churches, as well as many charismatic, independent, united, and uniting churches.

*“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”*  
– *Ephesians 4: 4-6*

While the preponderance of the founding churches in the mid-20th century were from Europe and North America, the majority today are found in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Pacific. Well over 500 million people belong to WCC member churches.

The WCC's programmes share responsibility for strengthening the fellowship, spiritual life, youth engagement, inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, and building a just community of women and men among other concerns.

At its 10th Assembly at Busan, Korea, in 2013, the WCC invited Christians and all people of good will to join a “pilgrimage of justice and peace” as a coordinated embodiment of the vision and spirit of Just Peace, working together to heal a world filled with conflict, injustice, and pain.

This annual review of the activity of the WCC records many of the activities undertaken by the council during 2015 and continuing into 2016.

It tells the story of a unique organization that provides a workspace in which all are invited to reflect, speak, act, pray, and labour together in hope, to challenge and support one another, to share and debate the most pressing concerns of our day.



# Advocating hope

Since the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, we have been building on the vision of a pilgrimage of justice and peace. With member churches, ecumenical partners, and others of good will, the WCC has raised a voice of hope in a world filled with doubts and dangers.

Looking back over 2015, it is possible to appreciate more clearly the mission of advocacy undertaken by the ecumenical movement and related faith-based organizations. In the pages of this annual review, readers will discern an assortment of ways in which the WCC has witnessed in faith to the potential for a better world. In these introductory words, I'd like to focus on two activities in particular: our response to climate change and to the worldwide refugee crisis.

In December 2015, I was privileged to address the High Level Dialogue in COP21 at Paris, representing the many faith-based communities present at that conference on climate change. I felt it was urgent to use my time to emphasize the dimension of hope, despite all the challenges we face. This is the most essential dimension of our Christian faith in light of the cross and the resurrection – the faith that we share and that is the basis of our unity.

We do have good reason to critique the narrow-minded interests evident in the contemporary situation of human-made climate change. Nevertheless, as people and communities of faith, we also are called to express hope that necessary actions are truly possible and must be pursued enthusiastically.



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Member churches and partners throughout the world make us aware of the circumstances that result in refugee crises in almost every region.

In 2015, the situation of refugees stemming from violence in Syria and neighbouring countries has been especially pressing, as became clear to me not least during a visit to the refugee camp in Idomeni, Greece, in October. The WCC has responded in the context of faith in the living, loving, triune God.

As you will see in these pages, the World Council as a fellowship of churches is active in facilitating collaboration for justice and peace. We are working with other faith-based organizations, United Nations agencies, and diverse international actors pledged to eradicate poverty, disease, and war. In such ways, we continue the journey and advocate for a hope made real in love for others.

*Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit*  
*General Secretary, WCC*



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“You and I will be held accountable for what we do to that child, to that woman, to that young man and young woman...” (Dr Agnes Abuom)



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## The Church: Towards a common vision

The WCC Commission on Faith and Order’s convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the second such convergence document issued by the Commission since 1982, continues to be discussed by churches on their common journey toward revealing the unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ, a journey inextricably linked with our on-going pilgrimage of justice and peace.

In the long term, as ecumenical groups and churches receive the convergence text, they move beyond theological agreement to living the essence of the text. In 1982, churches similarly received “Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry” and came to embrace its insights by sharing its vision.

Following the publication of *The Church* in 2013, the WCC has been promoting this text with the goal of inspiring a significant number of responses, ultimately leading the churches to discover and explore a greater expanse of common ground.

The reception process for *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* ends in December 2016, at which time responses from the churches will be prepared by the Faith and Order Commission for analysis and study in 2017-2018.

## Refugees: A common witness to dignity for all

While news headlines continued to document tragedies on land and sea as desperate people fled violence and abject poverty in their homelands, representatives of governments, UN agencies, and civil society organizations, including churches and faith-based organizations, met in January 2016 at a high-level Geneva conference on the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe, hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The meeting, co-sponsored by UNICEF, UNFPA and UNHCR, aimed to review events in 2015 and to promote human rights-based and coordinated responses to refugees and migrants in Europe. “We have to do advocacy work and lobby within

our own confessional community areas,” stated Dr Agnes Abuom, moderator of the WCC Central and Executive Committees, in her closing remarks. “We talked about addressing those fearful voices, those that are afraid, that are vulnerable to negative messaging.”

Abuom concluded, “You and I will be held accountable for what we do to that child, to that woman, to that young man and young woman, in resettling them, in making it possible for them to find meaning in life. May God bless us and may we continue in our little ways, in our small ways to build on what is already ongoing.”

# Mission and evangelism: Discerning the way ahead

WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) director Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum is hard at work with members of the commission, making plans for 2018's WCC world mission conference.

“We need to reintroduce the aspects of radical transformation in the values of God's kingdom in today's troubled world,” says Keum. “CWME intends to focus on three thematic areas as we move toward the 2018 mission conference: transformation and discipleship; Holy Spirit and empowerment; the missional movement and the ‘pilgrimage of

justice and peace.’” Commissioner Jennifer Martin sees the pilgrimage as a journey of accompaniment with those afflicted by oppression and says a core function of CWME is to “challenge and encourage people into claiming the abundant life which God has created for them.”

CWME's vice-moderator Rev. Dr Janet Corlett reports that in its planning the group “has prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance in discerning how our conference might serve the mission of God, challenge the current age, and inspire us all with God's promise of life.”



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## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: Ecumenical resources shared globally

Each year, materials for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are prepared by members of churches in a particular nation. Challenged by Christians from Brazil in 2015 to strive for greater attention to religious and cultural diversity, communities in many countries reflected together on John 4:7, “Jesus said to her: ‘Give me to drink.’”

The theme, proposed by a group called into being by the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (CONIC), drew attention to intolerance, an aspect of the religious situation that transcends the

Brazilian context. The text from John 4 also sparked a dialogue on water justice. Reflecting in social media, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit wrote, “The unity of the Church we seek along our way is unity in the water of baptism, renewed at every well where we share life and the grace of God.”

The materials for the Week of Prayer are jointly published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches.



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## The WCC at COP21: Standing together with member churches and partner organizations

The WCC, together with several of its member churches and partners, sent an ecumenical delegation to Paris to strengthen the call for a legally binding climate agreement and for the imperative that COP21 would “translate human and ecological stewardship into concrete climate action, to show inter-generational responsibility, to initiate unprecedented individual, economic and structural transformation, and

to pursue climate justice,” as stated in a declaration of the WCC Executive Committee released in the lead-up to COP21.

Following calls for climate justice by religious leaders such as Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church, the WCC brought strong voices from reli-

gious communities demanding a fair, ambitious, and legally binding treaty in Paris.

On the eve of the opening of COP21, the English newspaper *The Guardian* quoted the WCC general secretary’s words about the expectations in Paris: “The political leaders of the world are speaking like preachers. May they continue as believers.”

During the conference, over 100 people from the WCC, the Lutheran World Federation and ACT Alliance worked alongside other faith and civil society representatives at Paris. After the climate agreement was announced, church leaders stressed the critical

role churches and faith-based organizations played in the process. They urged churches to push global leaders to implement the agreement.

Daniele Violetti, chief of staff of the United Nations climate change body, praised the role of inter-faith organizations: “Thank you for all that you did on the way to Paris and during the conference. The moral imperative has been at the centre of the climate talks and that is a direct consequence of your engagement.”

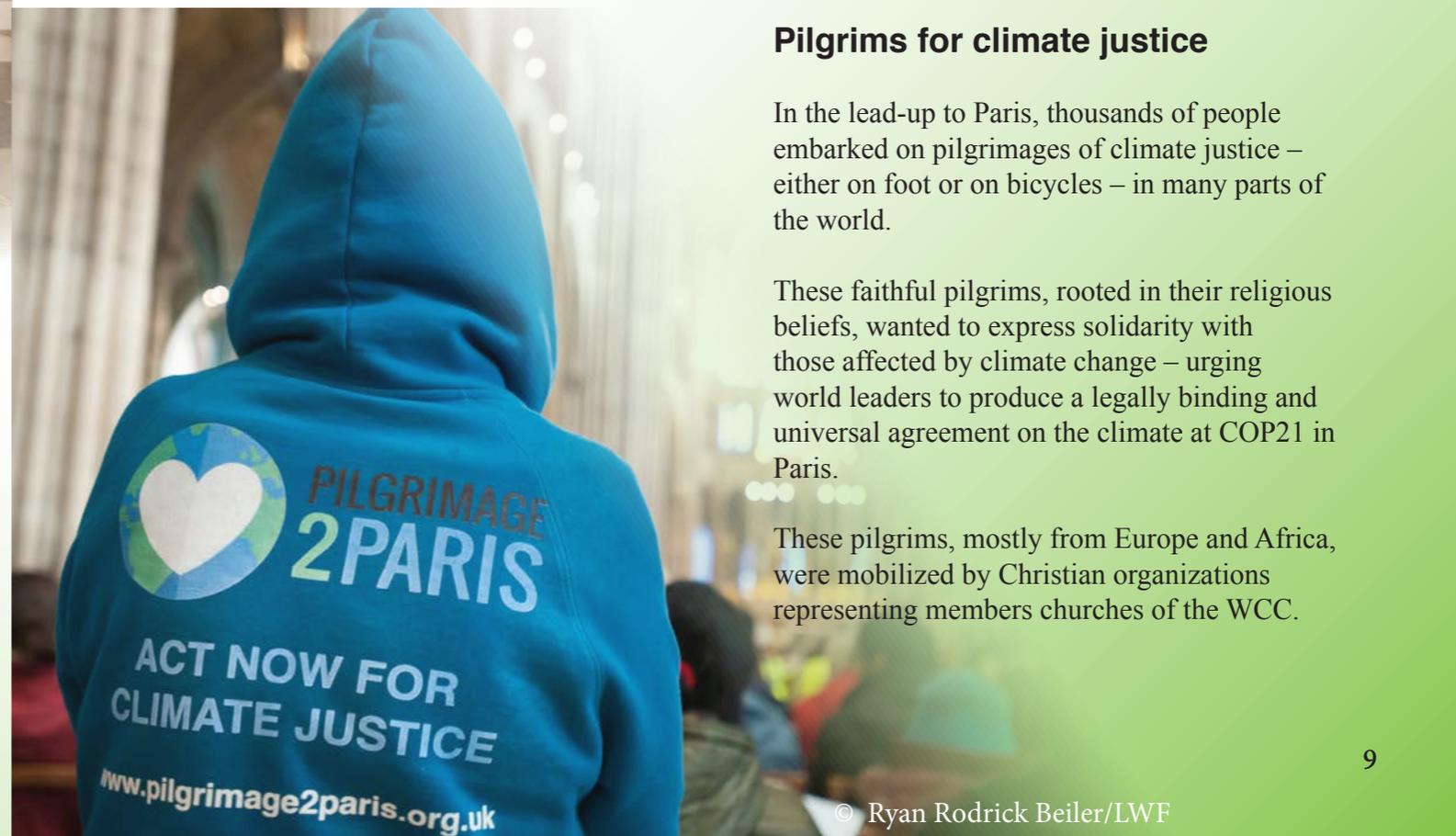
”You continue to want to be engaged. This is essential,” he added.

### Pilgrims for climate justice

In the lead-up to Paris, thousands of people embarked on pilgrimages of climate justice – either on foot or on bicycles – in many parts of the world.

These faithful pilgrims, rooted in their religious beliefs, wanted to express solidarity with those affected by climate change – urging world leaders to produce a legally binding and universal agreement on the climate at COP21 in Paris.

These pilgrims, mostly from Europe and Africa, were mobilized by Christian organizations representing members churches of the WCC.



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## WCC-UNICEF: For child-friendly churches

“Children need to know their place in the church. And that is at the front, not the back,” said Bishop Raphael Opoko from the Methodist Church of Nigeria and member of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, speaking on promoting the rights of children.

“Children should be singing at the front of the church, reading the liturgy and even preaching,” said Bishop Opoko, who serves on both the WCC’s Executive Committee and the Central Committee.

The Nigerian church leader made his pitch during a November 2015 event aimed at achieving a stronger voice for children’s rights. This was the first meeting since the WCC and UNICEF signed an historic agreement to work together in September.

Liza Barrie, chief of UNICEF’s Civil Society Partnerships Unit, explained that UNICEF for some time has valued working in partnership with faith groups, and cited the importance of the relationship with churches, seeing the timing of the “ambitious agreement” as “strategic.”

“Faith communities do tremendous work on the ground,” said Barrie. “Churches know what is happening in communities in ways that almost no other network does. They have women’s groups. They have children’s groups. They are always part of the community. We are natural partners.”

Under the 2015 agreement, UNICEF will be working with the WCC and its member church to recognize, monitor, and promote child rights within congregations and communities worldwide.

“Children need to know their place in the church. And that is at the front, not the back...”

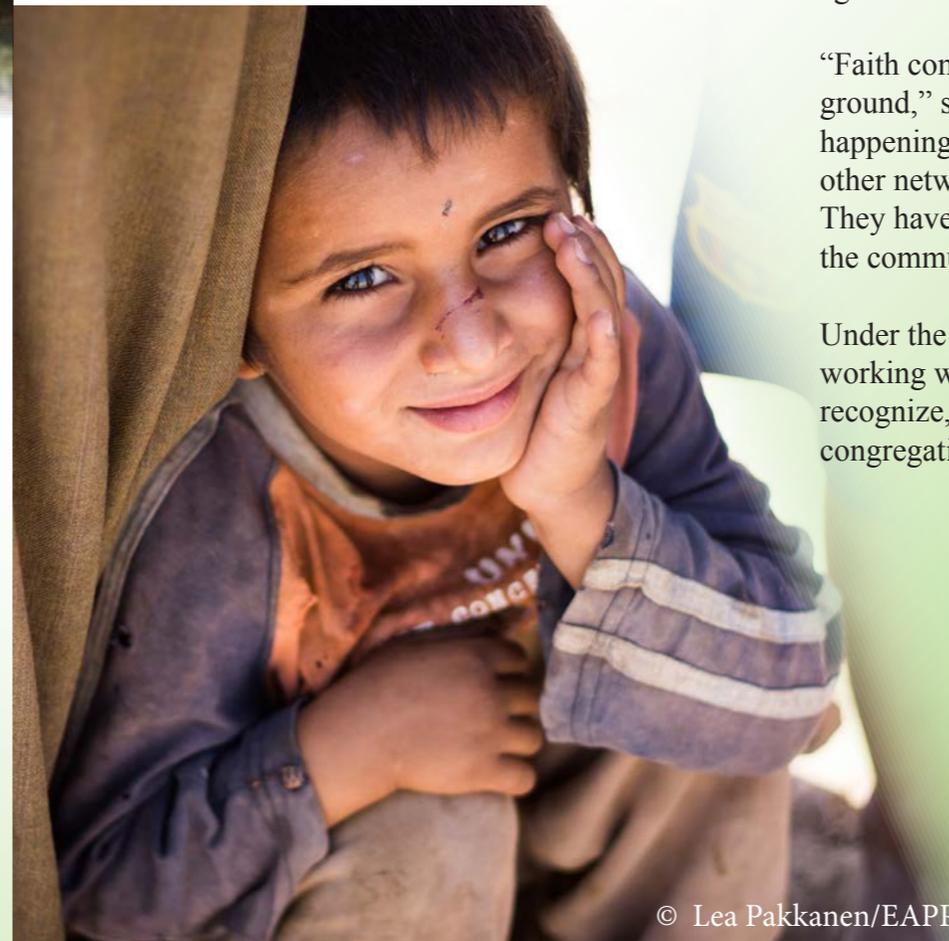
## On a pilgrimage through Latin America

To strengthen relationships and support churches in Latin America in their struggles for justice and peace, the WCC president for Latin America and the Caribbean Rev. Gloria Ulloa accompanied general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit on a pilgrimage through Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Colombia from 24 August to 7 September 2015.

They met with representatives of member churches, local ecumenical partners, civil society organizations as well as government officials and diplomats. Some of the highlights of the pilgrimage were a panel held in the Argentinean capital with human rights organizations such as the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the Argentinian Commission for Refugees and Migrants (CAREF) and the Permanent

Assembly of Human Rights (APDH); a meeting with Chilean President Michelle Bachelet; ecumenical prayers at the Brasilia cathedral, and the audience with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, in Bogota.

During the meeting with President Santos, Ulloa and Tveit shared information about the direct participation of the WCC in different peace processes around the world and the willingness of the local and global ecumenical fellowship to be part of the implementation of the peace process after the agreement between the government and the rebel group FARC is signed. There are 27 WCC member churches in Latin America representing about 4.4 million Christians.



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# The WCC responding to HIV and AIDS

For more than 25 years, the World Council of Churches has sponsored a campaign to equip communities of faith in an increasing number of nations to become “HIV-competent.”

As one example, economic empowerment and a thriving positive engagement in community life for women affected by HIV and AIDS was the focus of training sponsored by the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA) of the World Council of Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Held in collaboration with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, the session brought

together 15 women from Harare to learn livelihood skills.

By helping to make these women economically independent, the training strengthened the integration of women in the communities, where they otherwise may be stigmatized due to their HIV-positive status.

The training programme, meant to promote theological reflection on HIV and AIDS, with emphasis being placed on the quest for “abundant life” (John 10:10), also highlighted the importance of solidarity among women from different life settings and segments of society.



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# The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance: Once again a part of the WCC

In 2015, the WCC and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) agreed to re-establish the EAA as the WCC’s ecumenical initiative, preserving the future of this diverse Christian network for international action on selected, focused issues.

Over the past 15 years, the EAA has brought together Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, and Orthodox churches and Christian organizations to initiate campaigns on focused issues. Designed as an organization meant to maximize the impact of faith-based voices and action for justice, the EAA has built a high level of recognition for Christian expertise and advocacy, particularly in the areas of HIV and AIDS, sustainable agriculture, and food security.

“We are delighted that the EAA’s diverse network and unique ecumenical advocacy approach can continue to help churches and Christian organizations to speak out with one voice and take action together for justice, health, and dignity,” said Rev. Dr Richard Fee, formerly chair of the EAA board of directors and general secretary of the Life and Mission Agency of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

“This is one concrete way for the WCC strategically to give leadership and play an important role as convenor for the ecumenical movement,” said Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri, one of the WCC’s associate general secretaries.



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# Peacemaking and dialogue

The pilgrimage of justice and peace has taken representatives of the WCC to many of the world's conflict points. The council has partnered with people of other faiths and with diverse churches in seeking peace from Syria to Nigeria, from the Korean peninsula to Latin America.

In November 2015, members of more than 150 faith-based organizations gathered in Bogota, Colombia, to discuss their role in the peace process in that country.

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, WCC representative to the United Nations, was one of the keynote speakers. He reported on the council's experience in negotiation and peace dialogues in South Africa, El Salvador, Guatemala, South Sudan, as well as specific contributions of churches in Colombia.

"The churches have a presence in the farthest corners of the country, where the state itself finds such a presence to be difficult. They assume a critical role in the reconciliation process," he added.

Colombian minister of the interior Juan Fernando Cristo acknowledged the work on peace being done by religious leaders and encouraged the faith-based organizations to continue their ministry.

The WCC and its partners are also involved in peacemaking endeavours in Palestine and Israel, South Sudan, Ukraine and other countries.



# On the pilgrimage for a nuclear-free world

Church leaders from seven countries currently making historic choices for or against outlawing nuclear weapons set out on a pilgrimage in August 2015 to the two Japanese cities that were decimated by atomic bombs 70 years ago.

These church leaders, who represent member churches of the World Council of Churches from the United States, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Norway, the Netherlands, and

Pakistan, travelled to Hiroshima and Nagasaki to commemorate the atomic bombings on 6 and 9 August 1945.

“We invite Christians around the world to join us in prayer...”

In Japan the delegates met with atomic bomb survivors, church members, religious leaders, and

government officials. In the aftermath, they also met with leaders of their own countries to urge their governments to join a new inter-governmental pledge to establish a formal ban on nuclear weapons. This humanitarian initiative already has the support of 113 countries.

Bishop Mary Ann Swenson of the United Methodist Church in the United States, vice-moderator of the WCC Central and Executive Committees, led the delegation. “We invite Christians around the world

to join us in prayer as we make this pilgrimage,” she said. The mission to Japan and six other nuclear-dependent countries is part of the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.



## Seeking truth and reconciliation

In the wake of the release of a summary report by Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, member churches in Canada launched a painful journey toward recognizing the mistreatment of their country’s Indigenous Peoples and ensuring such abuse will not happen again.

Their report, which comprises six years of research, details the forced removal of indigenous children from their homes and the subsequent abuse many of them suffered at government-sponsored residential schools run by churches. The schools began operating in 1883; the last one closed in 1998.

Acknowledging the churches’ past role in the abuse carries with it the responsibility to take action to change policies that allowed it to happen, said Bishop Mark MacDonald, WCC president for North America and the National Indigenous Bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada.

“The relationship of the church to colonization reveals a number of deficiencies in the church — especially in the West — and also reveals some of the distortion of our teaching and our practice,” he said.

“Reconciliation has always been the heart of who we are, but that message was lost in colonization.” WCC member churches in Canada have been urging the Canadian government to sign the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In its report, the commission offers 94 recommendations, including an overhaul of the child welfare system for indigenous children. WCC member churches in Canada expressed their hope that ecumenical dialogue will help enrich their understanding of reconciliation, as well as adding a measure of accountability for action.



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# Interfaith dialogue and Christian identity

The WCC sponsors activities that aid in connecting members of churches with neighbours of other faiths, seeking ways of living together in peace. In the process of dialogue and cooperation, significant questions arise. For example: How does the on-going quest for Christian unity, a central goal of the ecumenical movement, relate to the search for inter-religious understanding?

*Called to Dialogue: Inter-religious and Intra-Christian Dialogue in Ecumenical Conversation* is a new resource from the World Council of Churches communicating the collective wisdom of ecumenical and inter-religious experts from around the world.

“Even as our intra-Christian dialogue continues, inter-religious encounter has become more widespread and visible,” says Clare Amos, WCC programme executive for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. “And the marked pluralism of our globalized situation, along with such geopolitical



shifts as migration, persecution and inter-religious violence, not to mention religious extremism, have added urgency and poignancy to our search for understanding.”

## YATRA: Embracing multi-religious challenges

Young adults from Asian churches were invited to participate in a two-week-long training programme called Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity (YATRA). Through an inter-cultural live-in experience, participants enhanced their knowledge of inter-religious dialogue and collaboration and their contribution to building peaceful and just communities.

The training took place from 7 to 20 June in Siam Reap, Cambodia. Addressing the theme “In God’s Name: Religions Resourcing and Resisting Violence,” participants critically analysed how religions are used to perpetrate violence, as well as how religions may offer resistance to violence, establishing harmonious communities.

The YATRA training also provided participants an opportunity to understand complex intersections between religion and politics in contemporary Asian contexts.

The training featured theological reflections,

workshops, Bible studies, lectures by religious scholars, study of ecumenical documents, analysis, exposure visits, and the cross-cultural experience of living together in a community and learning from one another.

## The WCC provides spiritual resources

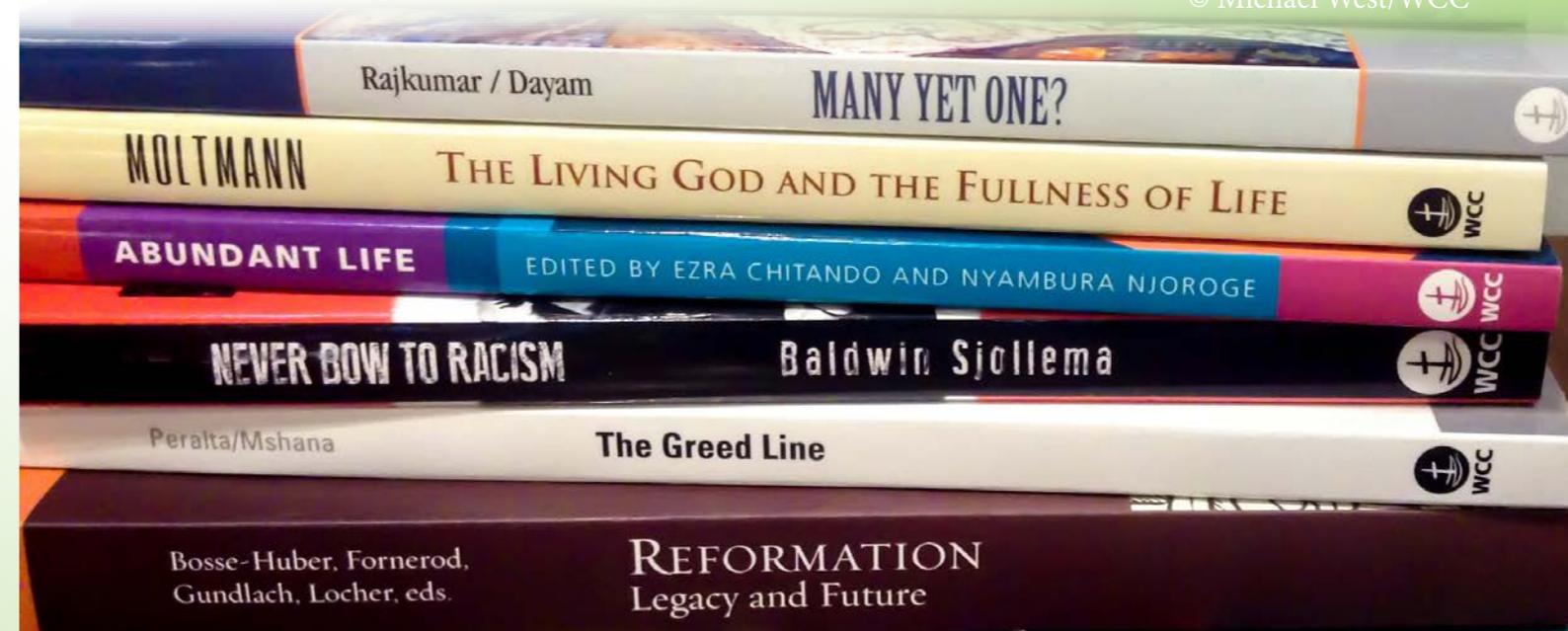
The WCC provides important historical, theological, and spiritual resources through WCC Publications. This facilitates global Christianity’s “alternative voice” and enhances the ecumenical movement’s larger visibility and cultural presence.

The WCC publishes about 15 titles per year, as well as several programme reports, and ten issues of its journals, notably *The Ecumenical Review* and *International Review of Mission*.

Works engage religious and social issues confronting world Christianity, inform and encourage the ecumenical movement, and provide resources for research on ecumenical history and theology.

Key works published in 2015 include *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Ecumenical Quest* (Keith Clements), *Journey for Justice* (Natalie Maxson), *The Living God and the Fullness of Life* (Jürgen Moltmann), and *The Ecumenical Movement*, 2d ed. (Michael Kinnamon).

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## Commemorating the Armenian Genocide

In 2015, the WCC participated in memorial services of the centenary of the beginning of the Armenian Genocide in locations ranging from the capital of the Republic of Armenia to the National Cathedral in the US capital Washington, D.C., from the medieval cathedral in Geneva to Bikfaya in Lebanon.

The WCC general secretary spoke in each place, expressing the solidarity of world Christianity. “The member churches of the World Council of Churches have pledged themselves to stand against all

genocides, wherever they happen,” said the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit in June 2015 after a solemn service at the Armenian Genocide Memorial and Museum overlooking Yerevan, Armenia.

Partly in recognition of centenary observances world-wide, the WCC Executive Committee accepted the invitation of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos Karekin II to hold their first meeting of 2015 near Yerevan in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

## Lights for an ecumenical future

### Role of faith-based organizations

There is a renewed interest from UN agencies and international organizations to cooperate with faith-based organizations.

The time is right for an ecumenical discussion on the vision and value of these partnerships, and how they can serve the interest of the churches and the one ecumenical movement.

### A common journey

With special focus on the Middle East in 2016, the WCC continues to strengthen its engagement in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in pursuit of visible unity and common witness.

In this context, hope appears as a major lens and as a reference point of reflection and description of the situation in the Holy Land.

## Ecumenical Institute at Bossey celebrating 70 years

In 2016 the World Council of Churches will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Ecumenical Institute, inaugurated in 1946 at the Château de Bossey, Switzerland.

At Bossey, where people live, learn, and pray together in an intercultural and interconfessional community of faith, the future leaders of the ecumenical movement are formed to be agents of dialogue and reconciliation in the search for Christian unity and harmony with all God’s people.

© Luc Hegetschweiler/WCC



# WCC financial results 2015

Financial results 2015 (Swiss francs 000's)	Unrestricted and designated funds	Restricted funds	Total funds	Total funds
	2015	2015	2015	2014
<b>Income</b>				
Membership and other unrestricted income	3 877	-	3 877	4 206
Programme contributions	-	14 766	14 766	16 158
Investment and currency gains/(losses)	(326)	116	(210)	1 080
Rental income, sales and other income	6 772	386	7 158	7 918
Unrestricted income distribution	(3 065)	3 065	-	-
<b>Total income</b>	<b>7 258</b>	<b>18 333</b>	<b>25 591</b>	<b>29 362</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>				
Direct programme costs: grants	-	993	993	1 449
Operating and other programme costs	5 838	5 773	11 611	12 507
Salaries	4 789	8 498	13 287	14 297
Redistribution of costs; internal (sales)/charges	(3 138)	3 138	-	-
<b>Total costs</b>	<b>7 489</b>	<b>18 402</b>	<b>25 891</b>	<b>28 253</b>
Transfers between funds	5	(5)	-	-
Transfers to funds	466	576	1 042	142
<b>Net increase in funds for the year</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>742</b>	<b>1 251</b>

In January 2015, the Swiss National Bank ceased its policy of supporting the CHF/EUR rate at 1.2. The Swiss franc strengthened against the Euro and other currencies, with an unfavourable impact of CHF 1.7 million on WCC contributions income compared with 2014.

Total income for the WCC was therefore CHF 3.8 million lower in 2015, at CHF 25.6 million, compared to CHF 29.4 million.

The WCC reported total expenditure of CHF 25.9 million in 2015 and, after exceptional transfers to funds of CHF 1 million, a net increase in funds and reserves of CHF 0.7 million.

The financial result for the year exceeded expectations, particularly in a difficult financial year; it also represented the second consecutive year of surplus.



Financial report



## The WCC: A global fellowship of churches

The WCC is a fellowship of 345 member churches who together represent more than half a billion Christians around the world.

WCC member churches can be found in all regions of the world and include most of the world's Orthodox churches (Eastern and Oriental), as well as African Instituted, Anglican, Assyrian, Baptist, Evangelical, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Moravian, Old-Catholic, Pentecostal, Reformed, United/Uniting and Free/Independent churches, Disciples of Christ and Friends (Quakers).

The WCC has identified eight regions that

complement one another in their partnership.

Representatives of each region attempt to apply the goals of the global movement toward unity within those cultural contexts where their member churches live and bear witness.

Representation of churches by geographical regions arose from a vision of Christian unity that would no longer be held captive by "western parochialism" but provide a balance among churches of east and west, south and north. This balanced diversity was deemed essential to the catholicity, or universality, of the world-wide church.

# Join the WCC in social media



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