



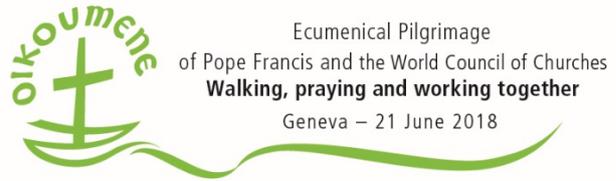
Ecumenical Pilgrimage
of Pope Francis and the World Council of Churches
Walking, praying and working together
Geneva – 21 June 2018

#PapalVisit

**On the Occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the
World Council of Churches**

#WCC70

QUICK INFO FOR JOURNALISTS



The World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the broadest and most inclusive ecumenical organization in the world.

It's a fellowship of 348 member churches from 110 countries that together represent more than 550 million Christians.

It was founded in 1948 in Amsterdam (the Netherlands).

Its goal is Christian unity. It promotes Christian unity in faith, witness and service for a just and peaceful world.

WCC member churches can be found in all continents and include most of the world's Orthodox churches, 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 current secretary general of the WCC, since 2010, is Norwegian Lutheran pastor Rev. Dr Olav Eykse Tveit.

Its symbol is a boat sailing on the sea of the world with the mast in the form of a cross, embodying faith and unity, carrying the message of the ecumenical movement.

The word *oikoumene* is from the Greek and refers to “the whole inhabited world,” indicating the scope of the movement for unity, embracing churches, humanity and all creation.

Current leadership of the WCC

The World Council of Churches is led by its general secretary with the moderator and the two vice-moderators of its central committee, who together make up its officers.

They are elected by the central committee, which is itself elected by the WCC assembly and is made up of 150 representatives of member churches from all over the world.



WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

A Lutheran pastor and theologian from Norway.

Elected general secretary of the World Council of Churches in August 2009, and re-elected to a second term in July 2014, Tveit served WCC previously as a member of the Faith and Order Plenary Commission and as a co-chair of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum core group.

From 2002 to 2009 he was the general secretary of the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations.

You can follow the WCC general secretary on Twitter: [@OlavTveit](https://twitter.com/OlavTveit)
For further information see [here](#).



Moderator of the WCC central committee Dr Agnes Abuom

A theologian from the Anglican Church of Kenya, she is the first woman and the first African in this position in the history of the World Council of Churches.

Abuom has served on the WCC executive committee and was the Africa president for the WCC from 1999 to 2006. She has been associated with the All Africa Conference of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Kenya and WCC member churches in Africa, as well as Religions for Peace. Her areas of work include economic justice, peace and reconciliation.

For further information see [here](#).



Vice-moderator of the WCC central committee Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima

From the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, he is a professor of Orthodox theology and canon law at a number of universities. He was a vice-moderator of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission from 1998-2006. He is co-president of the Joint International Orthodox-Lutheran Theological Dialogue, co-secretary and member of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, and co-chairman of the Orthodox and Methodist and Baptist theological preparatory committees.

For further information see [here](#).



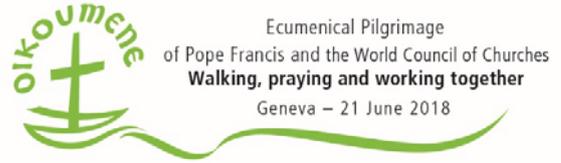
Vice-moderator of the WCC central committee Bishop Mary Ann Swenson

She is a bishop of the United Methodist Church of the USA.

She serves as president of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-religious Concerns (GCCUIC) of her church. In the past, while a pastor in Wenatchee, Washington, she was in charge of the Rape Crisis and Domestic Violence Center, and of the North Central Washington AIDS Coalition.

For further information see [here](#).

The WCC also has 8 presidents, from the eight world regions. They are: Rev. Dr [Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel](#), Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; Rev. Prof. Dr [Sang Chang](#), Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea; Archbishop [Anders Wejryd](#), Church of Sweden; Rev. [Gloria Nohemy Ulloa Alvarado](#), Presbyterian Church in Colombia; Bishop [Mark MacDonald](#), Anglican Church of Canada; Rev. Dr [Mele'ana Puloka](#), Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga; H.B. [John X](#), Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East; H.H. [Karekin II](#), the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.



The WCC's structure

The assembly – the central committee – the executive committee

All the member churches of the WCC are represented at the **assembly**, which is held approximately every eight years in a different part of the world.

The assembly is the "supreme legislative body" of the WCC and elects a **central committee** composed of 150 representatives of the member churches. The central committee (which has just been meeting in Geneva 15-21 June 2018) is the governing body between assemblies and meets every two years.

The next assembly, the WCC's 11th, will take place in 2021.

The 10th Assembly took place in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2013 with the theme "God of life, lead us to justice and peace."

The central committee elects from among its members an executive committee composed of twenty-five members. The latter meets twice a year.

The central committee also elects the **general secretary** of the WCC to a five-year term. Currently this office is held by the Norwegian Lutheran pastor Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit.

The central committee is chaired by its **moderator** and two **vice-moderators**, who are elected by the central committee. The current moderator is Dr Agnes Abuom from the Anglican Church of Kenya. Co-moderators are Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima (Limouris) of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and Bishop Mary Ann Swenson of the United Methodist Church in the USA.

Part of the WCC leadership are also its eight presidents, one for each of the eight world regions. For further information see here.



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#WCC70 – but the ecumenical movement is older than that

History

In 2018 the World Council of Churches (WCC) celebrates its 70th anniversary, but the modern ecumenical movement began far earlier than that.

In 1910, during the Edinburgh Missionary Conference (Scotland), several churches emphasized the need for a common path toward unity, to overcome "the scandal of divisions" among believers. At the end of the 1930s, two parts of the ecumenical movement, "Life and Work" and "Faith and Order," born in the 1920s, merged into a single body. In 1938 a provisional committee meeting in Utrecht (the Netherlands) laid the foundations of the future World Council of Churches, but the founding of the WCC was delayed by the Second World War and took place only in 1948.

At the first assembly, in Amsterdam (the Netherlands), representatives of 147 Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches participated. Since then, an increasing number of churches from every continent have joined the WCC, which today includes 348 members.

The first general secretary of the WCC was **Willem A. Visser 't Hooft**, from the Netherlands. Like many ecumenical leaders of the time, he was formed by the ecumenical youth movement of the **World Student Christian Federation** (WSCF), of which he had also been secretary general.

Among the more conspicuous and successful initiatives of the WCC have been:

- its work in resettling hundreds of thousands of refugees after World War II;
- its leadership in the struggle for more than 20 years against apartheid;
- its early international advocacy for the environment through its programme on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation;
- its leadership in forging consensus among the churches about fundamental issues in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*;
- its sponsorship of a decade of solidarity and advocacy for women in the churches; i
- ts active advocacy for peace and justice through the United Nations;
- and its uniting churches around the world in concrete work for justice through the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.



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WCC relations with the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the World Council of Churches but has actively collaborated with the WCC, especially since promulgation of the *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegratio)* by the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

The WCC has longstanding relationships with the Roman Catholic Church through the Joint Working Group (JWG), the Commission on Faith and Order, and in the areas of mission (through the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism) and education (through the Ecumenical Institute Bossey).

Collaboration between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church is mainly with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), but also with other dicasteries of the Vatican.

Among the main areas of this ecumenical dialogue and collaboration are:

- Expressing the visible unity of the Church (for example, through the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity)
- Ongoing multi-lateral theological discussions (for example, on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry)
- Environmental and economic issues and the common good: collaborative work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation
- Migrants and refugees
- Interreligious dialogue and cooperation.
- Education and formation on ecumenical issues (Ecumenical Institute Bossey)

There is no constitutional reason why the Roman Catholic Church could not join the WCC; in fact it has never applied.

Pope Paul VI visited the WCC headquarters in Geneva on 10 June 1969. This was followed by a visit by Pope John Paul II on 12 June 1984. The visit by Pope Francis on 21 June 2018 will be the first time a papal visit has been organized specifically to the WCC.

For further information see https://www.oikoumene.org/en/papal-visit/RCC_WCC_for_media_kit.pdf