

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Mission in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

World Council of Churches Commission on
World Mission and Evangelism Documents 2018–2021



Edited by Risto Jukko



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of Churches

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FOREWORD

The World Council of Churches (WCC) central committee affirmed the following in its meeting in Rolle, Switzerland, in 1951: “Thus the obligation to take the Gospel to the whole world, and the obligation to draw all Christ’s people together both rest upon Christ’s whole work, and are indissolubly connected. Every attempt to separate these two tasks violates the wholeness of Christ’s ministry to the world.”¹ The integration of the WCC and the International Missionary Council ten years later—in 1961 at the WCC assembly in New Delhi, India—materialized that theological affirmation on the institutional level.

Since then, unity and mission have been at the heart of the ecumenical movement, as the WCC established the Division of and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in 1961 to take over the tasks of the International Missionary Council founded in 1921.

At the WCC’s assembly in Busan, 2013, its member churches committed themselves to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The same assembly introduced the second official WCC statement on mission—*Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*—to the fellowship of the churches, presenting a fresh ecumenical understanding of mission. This document, prepared by the CWME, has oriented the work of the CWME from Busan until now and will continue to do so to the next WCC assembly in Karlsruhe 2022 and beyond.

This has happened together with the most powerful outcome document of the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania—*The Arusha Call to Discipleship*—which was unanimously adopted by the participants of the conference in March 2018. The document has been translated into several languages and has already inspired many conferences and seminars in the last years. It will be one of the key documents for any discussion about mission at the Karlsruhe assembly.

Along with *Together towards Life*, this more recent mission document has also oriented the programmatic work of the CWME since the conference in Arusha. Mission and discipleship clearly have strong theological and spiri-

¹ Minutes and Reports of the Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Rolle (Switzerland), August 4–11, 1951, 66.

tual connections, so the CWME and its three working groups have paid a great deal of attention to these in their work. A third impetus to their work has been the upcoming assembly's theme, "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity" (see 2 Cor. 5:18-20). The assembly theme—the first explicitly Christological theme since the WCC assembly in Vancouver in 1983—is thoroughly missiological. Receiving God's reconciliation in Christ, we become participants in God's mission and ambassadors of reconciliation, unity, and justice. We become reconcilers as followers of Christ, as disciples, to which the Arusha Call so urgently invites us.

The CWME study papers in this publication present the fruit of CWME's thematic working groups from the last three years. All of them, together with an earlier document of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN), were adopted by the full commission online meeting in March 2021. Each one of them reflects its own thematic emphasis. The study paper of the Working Group on Theology for Mission shows clear theological and missiological relations between discipleship and the assembly theme elements of Christ's love, the world, reconciliation, and unity. The Working Group on Transforming Discipleship (previously the Working Group on Evangelism) highlights that converting discipleship is needed in the world of today, and the Working Group on Mission from the Margins relies very much on the thematic emphases in *Together towards Life* and in *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*. The EDAN document (2016) can be seen as a beginning of these three important reflections and perceptions of mission in today's world.

It is evident to any reader that these documents reflect a great deal of hard work, both skilful theological reflection and editorial rigour. I want to express my gratitude to the CWME and its working groups and to EDAN—and in particular to their moderators, who have, with the help of members of the working groups and staff, written short introductions to their respective working groups' study papers and documents.

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca
Acting general secretary
World Council of Churches

1.

INTRODUCTION: WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES COMMISSION ON WORLD MISSION AND EVANGELISM AND ITS STUDY PAPERS AND DOCUMENTS

The priority of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) is to empower churches and mission bodies to missionary cooperation and encourage them to do mission in Christ's way. One of the several ways the Commission and its working groups have done that is to produce documents of various levels for the use of churches, mission agencies and theological faculties, institutes, and seminars and seminaries.

The WCC assembly in Busan 2013 presented the second WCC ecumenical affirmation on mission and evangelism, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, prepared by the CWME. The CWME documents prepared after the assembly were published digitally in *Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, 2018, Complete Digital Edition of the Arusha Report*.¹ This volume (report book) contains both the main report, the Arusha Conference Report and the main outcome—and probably the most powerful post-Busan document of the CWME—*The Arusha Call to Discipleship*. The Arusha Call was unanimously adopted by the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania, in 2018. The document has been translated into various languages and been discussed and studied widely in the ecumenical mission movement, and even beyond. Discussions about it are still going strong as the CWME/WCC is preparing for the next WCC assembly. The CWME adviser, the Rev. Prof. Kenneth R. Ross, published the first commentary on the Arusha Call, *Mission Rediscovered: Transforming Disciples*, in December 2021.² For the benefit of the reader and given the importance of the Arusha Conference Report and *The Arusha Call to Discipleship* to the CWME post-Arusha study papers, this publication begins with them.

¹ See Risto Jukko, ed., *Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, 2018 Complete Digital Edition of the Arusha Report* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019), 219–300, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Digital%20Edition_Arusha%20Report_20052019_compressed.pdf.

² Kenneth R. Ross, *Mission Rediscovered: Transforming Disciples. A Commentary on the Arusha Call to Discipleship* (Geneva: WCC Publications & Globethics.net, 2020).

After the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in 2018, the CWME and its working groups turned to reflect specifically on the relationship between mission and discipleship in light of the Arusha Call. In particular, they focused on interpreting the missionary meaning of discipleship to churches in the midst of today's "megatrends," such as COVID-19, the climate emergency, racism and inequalities, authoritarian politics, digitization, militarization, and multifaith approaches. In addition to the importance of the Arusha Call, this reflection has been consciously done in light of the WCC assembly in Karlsruhe 2022 and its theme "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." The biblical passage from which the assembly theme is drawn is 2 Corinthians 5:18–20. Many commentators have noticed already the missiological nature of the assembly theme. In the passage, God is and acts as a missionary God. God has reconciled us to Godself through Christ. But God's mission also includes us and engages us in giving us the ministry of reconciliation. When we share God-given reconciliation in Christ, we take part in God's mission and become ambassadors of reconciliation and unity with and for one another. This is mission.

In the theological reflections and debates of the work of the CWME, it has become very clear that a call to discipleship has a dual character. This is visible also in the study papers. On the one hand, discipleship is, first and foremost, personal. It does not leave anybody in a spectator's position, but challenges them. A call to follow Christ is one of the most existentially decisive calls addressed to human beings. What do we do when we hear Christ saying to us, "Come and follow me"? In the New Testament, we find those who answered affirmatively as well as those who, for one reason or another, were not willing to follow Jesus even though they were attracted by his personality, teaching and behaviour. We also find those who rejected the call and behaved aggressively and violently against Jesus—and later, against his disciples witnessing to Christ. There is an absolute freedom to answer "yes" or "no" to the call of Jesus.

On the other hand, a call to discipleship is not just personal but also communal. If we answered "yes" to Jesus' call and thus became his followers, we would join other followers. We would be committed to Jesus, "who lived among the people, sharing in their hopes and sufferings, giving his life on the cross for all humanity,"³ as well as to the community who is following

³ Risto Jukko and Jooseop Keum, eds, *Moving in the Spirit: Report of the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019), 17.

him. The communal aspect is already inherent in the personal call, and vice versa. In the service of mission, disciples are “broken and poured out for others.”⁴ Following Jesus means to go where he is and to meet those people he is with. Christ’s love moves us in particular to those who are on the margins.

Those CWME working group papers that are presented to and adopted by a full commission meeting are normally called CWME study papers (or study documents). This publication contains four of them, as we have included also the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network’s (EDAN’s) paper entitled “The Gift of Being—*Called to Be a Church of All and for All*,” presented to the WCC central committee in 2016. EDAN, with the Migration and Multicultural Ministry as well as Indigenous Peoples, has been integrated into the structure of the CWME since 2014 (that is, after the WCC assembly in Busan in 2013) as “Mission from the Margins.” The CWME Commission online meeting in March 2021 adopted the study papers of the Working Group on Theology for Mission, the Working Group on Transforming Discipleship (previously the Working Group on Evangelism), and the Working Group on Mission from the Margins, as well as the EDAN paper. The moderator of each working group—and in the case of EDAN, a staff member with the help of members of the working groups and the staff—has written a short introduction to their respective working group’s study paper or document.

As the reader will notice in reading these study papers, ecumenical mission in today’s world is very much aware of the missionary meaning of discipleship for churches in the frame of “mission from the margins” and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, racism and inequalities, authoritarian politics, digitization, militarization, and multifaith approaches. The reader may be interested in comparing the contents of the study papers with “The Next Agenda” presented by the Arusha Conference Harvesting Committee to the CWME in 2018:

- Mission as transforming discipleship in light of the reception of the Arusha Call 2018.
- Mission from the margins as a paradigm for our time.
- Mission and evangelism in a multi-religious world.

⁴ Ibid.

1. Introduction: World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and Its Study Papers and Documents

- The relationship of mission, evangelism, and development work.
- The relationship of costly discipleship and Christian unity.⁵

I am deeply grateful to the members of the CWME working groups and to EDAN for these documents. I hope that they will inspire, encourage, and motivate readers, whomever they are, to clearly hear the call of Christ in this world where there are many other voices and calls, and to answer affirmatively to this unique call to discipleship.

Risto Jukko

Director

World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism

⁵ Ibid., 19. Also p. 30 in this publication.

2.

THE ARUSHA CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP (WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania, 2018)

The World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism met in Arusha, Tanzania, on 8-13 March 2018. More than one thousand participants—all of whom are engaged in mission and evangelism—gathered from many different Christian traditions and from every part of the world.

We joyfully celebrated the life-giving movement of the Spirit of God in our time, drawing particular inspiration from African contexts and spiritualities. Through Bible study, common prayer, and worship, and by sharing our stories together, we were encouraged to be witnesses to the reign of God that has come to us through the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Despite some glimmers of hope, we had to reckon with death-dealing forces that are shaking the world order and inflicting suffering on many. We observed the shocking accumulation of wealth due to one global financial system, which enriches few and impoverishes many (Isaiah 5:8). This is at the root of many of today's wars, conflicts, ecological devastation, and suffering (1 Timothy 6:10). This global imperial system has made the financial market one of the idols of our time. It has also strengthened cultures of domination and discrimination that continue to marginalize and exclude millions, forcing some among us into conditions of vulnerability and exploitation. We are mindful that people on the margins bear the heaviest burden.

These issues are not new for 2018, but the Holy Spirit continues to move at this time, and urgently calls us as Christian communities to respond with personal and communal conversion, and a transforming discipleship.

Discipleship is both a gift and a calling to be active collaborators with God for the transforming of the world (1 Thessalonians 3:2). In what the church's early theologians called "theosis" or deification, we share God's grace by sharing God's mission. This journey of discipleship leads us to share and live out God's love in Jesus Christ by seeking justice and peace in ways that are different from the world's (John 14:27). Thus, we are responding to Jesus' call to follow him from the margins of our world (Luke 4:16–19).

2. The Arusha Call to Discipleship

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called by our baptism to transforming discipleship: a Christ-connected way of life in a world where many face despair, rejection, loneliness, and worthlessness.

We are called to worship the one triune God—the God of justice, love, and grace—at a time when many worship the false god of the market system (Luke 16:13).

We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ—the fullness of life, the repentance and forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life—in word and deed, in a violent world where many are sacrificed to the idols of death (Jeremiah 32:35) and where many have not yet heard the gospel.

We are called to joyfully engage in the ways of the Holy Spirit, who empowers people from the margins with agency, in the search for justice and dignity (Acts 1:8; 4:31).

We are called to discern the word of God in a world that communicates many contradictory, false, and confusing messages.

We are called to care for God's creation, and to be in solidarity with nations severely affected by climate change in the face of a ruthless human-centred exploitation of the environment for consumerism and greed.

We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities, in our quest for unity and on our ecumenical journey, in a world that is based upon marginalization and exclusion.

We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where the politicization of religious identities often causes conflict.

We are called to be formed as servant leaders who demonstrate the way of Christ in a world that privileges power, wealth, and the culture of money (Luke 22:25-27).

We are called to break down walls and seek justice with people who are dispossessed and displaced from their lands—including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—and to resist new frontiers and borders that separate and kill (Isaiah 58:6–8).

We are called to follow the way of the cross, which challenges elitism, privilege, and personal and structural power (Luke 9:23).

We are called to live in the light of the resurrection, which offers hope-filled possibilities for transformation.

This is a call to transforming discipleship.

This is not a call that we can answer in our own strength, so the call becomes, in the end, a call to prayer:

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of life in all its diversity and beauty.

Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, we praise you that you came to find the lost, to free the oppressed, to heal the sick, and to convert the self-centred.

Holy Spirit, we rejoice that you breathe in the life of the world and are poured out into our hearts. As we live in the Spirit, may we also walk in the Spirit.

Grant us faith and courage to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus: becoming pilgrims of justice and peace in our time. For the blessing of your people, the sustaining of the earth, and the glory of your name.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

3.

THE ARUSHA CONFERENCE REPORT (WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania, 2018)

Moved by the Spirit

The theme of the conference, “Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship,” suggests a movement of God’s people on a Spirit-led pilgrimage that is both ecumenical and transformative in character and purpose. With its broad participation from Protestant, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and African Instituted churches, the conference showed that the nature and character of mission and evangelism is truly multi-directional and multi-faceted. It indicated that there is not one centre but many centres impacting, shaping, and informing the understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in our time. Those present in Arusha were people from many parts of the world and of different ages, cultures, experiences, perspectives and orientations, each with stories of suffering and struggle as well as of hope and determination, celebrating the richness of the diversity of God’s creation. Together we were able to adopt and issue *The Arusha Call to Discipleship* as an expression of our unity in the transforming mission of God in the world.

The conference offered multiple spaces for joyful celebrations, mutual sharing and learning, and theological reflection. It offered rich opportunities to be in God’s presence, rejoicing and lamenting before the triune God. The participants met for daily prayers— in the morning, at noon, and in the evening – which proved to be a well from which we drank deeply, finding unity and inspiration. Together with the daily Bible studies, our shared experience of worship became key when discerning what Christian discipleship involves today. Sharing our stories together was significant: in the plenary sessions, at the table talks, and during the warshas (workshops; this Kiswahili term conveys the idea of discerning together on critical and cutting-edge issues through sharing of experiences and knowledge). Guided and empowered by the Word of God, enriched by powerful musical and artistic performances, and encouraged by the multitude of songs and prayers from all over the world, the conference affirmed its commitment to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in life, word, and deed.

The conference was deeply moved by the hospitality and generosity shown by the Local Host Committee and the welcome extended by the All Africa Conference of Churches. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, in close cooperation with churches of various denominational affiliations in the region, worked tirelessly with the practical arrangements throughout the week to make all the participants feel comfortable and at home. Not least was the ambitious programme on the Sunday morning when all the participants were offered rich opportunities to worship in local congregations in the region.

Besides the thematic plenaries and the ensuing collective reflections on the theme, evangelism, mission from the margins, missional formation, and embracing the cross, the conference was also greatly enriched by the warshas. These brought people together in small groups around specific issues and challenges through sharing of experiences of struggle and opportunities for change. Nearly 60 warshas were organized under the broad categories of migration, evangelism, life in all its fullness, diversity, and formation.

There were also three sessions of Sokoni (a Kiswahili term which means a marketplace for exchange) to share ideas, experiences, and skills – and to celebrate. These sessions were around the dreams and visions of young people, women, and the movements of the marginalized communities.

In an effort to enrich the ongoing reflections on mission from the margins, the conferences of Indigenous young people, people with disabilities, and women preceded the main conference. These groups have often been objects and victims of certain expressions of mission and evangelism. These gatherings provided a rich array of experiences and opportunities to imagine more authentic forms of mission and evangelism in an increasingly exclusionary world.

Inspired by Africa

The conference drew inspiration from the African context in which it met. In the sequence of world mission conferences that began in Edinburgh in 1910, this was only the second to be held in Africa, 60 years after meeting at Achimota, Ghana, in 1958. Tanzania – with its religious plurality, pursuit of social justice, commitment to peace and unity, and ethic of hospitality – provided a congenial context in which to hold the conference. Besides being known for its natural beauty, Arusha has been distinguished as a centre within the continent for the resolution of disputes, administration of jus-

tice, advocacy of human rights, and promotion of economic development. It is also an area where church life has been shaped by the East African Revival and finds vibrant expression today. The conference was greatly enlivened by young people from local churches who memorably contributed to its worship and deliberations.

Exposure to African spirituality and storytelling was both challenging and refreshing for the conference. The thirst for God that is found at the core of African life reminded participants that faith is a matter of the heart, that *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* need to be complemented by *orthokardia* (spirituality). While the joy of the gospel was abundantly evident, participants were also made aware of the struggles of African communities with forms of Christianity that were complicit in colonialism or culturally alienating. Hearing from participants from the African Instituted Churches and the Pentecostal churches allowed those attending the conference to appreciate these churches' contribution to reshaping African spirituality. The numerical growth of African Christianity is impressive by any reckoning, yet the churches remain challenged by the extent of the poverty, disease, and conflict that inflict suffering on many. More positively, Africans' deep awareness of the relational dimension of life and the importance of community helped the conference to recover life-giving biblical values.

Informed by *Together towards Life*

This was the first World Mission Conference to be held since the WCC's adoption of the new mission affirmation *Together towards Life* (TTL) in 2012. It was evident from the discussions at the conference that TTL has redrawn the landscape so far as mission and evangelism are concerned, and has provided a new conceptual framework for missiological thinking.

Leading themes of TTL carried forward strongly into the conference. The pneumatological turn taken by TTL in regard to the mission of God was reflected in the first part of the conference title: "Moving in the Spirit." TTL's call for "transformative spirituality" was echoed in the second part of the conference title: "Called to Transforming Discipleship".

Other distinctive notes of TTL that resonated in the conference included the new landscape of World Christianity, a Trinitarian understanding of mission, fullness of life as missiological criterion, the flourishing of creation, God's economy of life, mission from the margins, healing and wholeness, unity and community, humble yet affirmative evangelism, interfaith dialogue, and cultural sensitivity.

At the same time, by turning attention to discipleship, a theme that is little developed in TTL, the conference found a fresh focus for a vision of mission that draws deeply from TTL.

The conference was conscious that to be a disciple of Christ is a matter of faith, and that it is from the affirmation of our faith that we discern the path of discipleship in our time. Therefore, in the face of today's challenges, the conference affirmed that there is a faith we can and do hold.

Challenged by Our Global Crisis

Taking account of our global situation, the conference recognized that we are living in times when our shared life is volatile, uncertain, fragile, and fragmented. In some ways, the issues that trouble us are not new, but there is a sense that matters are escalating and there is need for new urgency in addressing them.

The conference lamented the ascendancy of death-dealing forces: the nationalism and fundamentalism that foment hatred, the militarism that stokes conflict, the greed that concentrates resources in the hands of the few at the expense of the many, and a new type of colonialism associated with the despotic reach of the culture of money.

As the conference heard from CWME moderator Geevarghese Coorilos: "There are new incarnations of Caesar. There are new avatars of Herod. There are new emperors. This is a new imperial era where numerous 'little empires' are being created within the orbit of a 'mega empire' that is working in hegemonic ways."

In Arusha, we heard about issues such as forced migration, disease and its effects on the population, ecological degradation, war and conflict, gender inequalities, exclusion and marginalization, appropriation of land, poverty and unemployment, and a reduction of social welfare and security. These issues are reflected and replicated in all regions of the globe, and they are escalating.

When we analyze the causes of these injustices, we see one economic system producing the gross accumulation of wealth for 1 percent of the world's population. This global imperial system has made the financial market one of the idols of our time and has strengthened cultures of domination and discrimination that continue to marginalize and exclude millions, forcing them into conditions of vulnerability and exploitation. Continual exploita-

tion of God's creation to obtain and maintain this economic system is creating conditions of ecological degradation.

Today's world—where so many face the ravages of climate change, fear of the other, uncontrolled conflicts, hatred and discrimination, violence and displacement, unrelenting poverty, and the merciless domination of market forces—is a world that cries out for transformation. There is a need for the kind of authentic discipleship that will offer, and live out, convincing answers to this cry.

Expressing hope that the conference would open new possibilities for the ecumenical community for a creative engagement with the world, Jooseop Keum, director of CWME, said:

The missionary movement has both inspired and given birth to the modern ecumenical movement during the last century as the churches have sought to respond to the challenges of history and to be witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ for the world through visible unity.... The world is broken. Therefore, it is imperative for the ecumenical movement to boldly witness the unity in the triune God and to live it out for the unity of humanity. The world is yearning for a Christian discipleship which reconciles the broken and troubled world. In order to do so, unity of the church and mission is not an optional agenda.

Jin S. Kim, pastor of All Nations Church in Minneapolis, USA, charted a pathway for those seeking to follow Christ in this contemporary context, calling for a collective Christian response that proposes alternatives to an unjust world:

Christians are to be called out of a sick society built on the evils of racism, sexism, militarism, exploitation, ecocide and destructive competition. We are to create a new community of love.... We will have to participate in the broader economic system, but we will not allow capitalist dogma to influence our internal economics. We will draw people from our immediate context of great brokenness, but our mission will include the casting out of imperial demons and the healing of bodies and souls so that we can relate rightly to our God, our neighbours (human and non-human), and God's good green earth.

Called to Deepen Our Discipleship

Discipleship is not something that begins with ourselves: "You did not choose me but I chose you" (John 15:16). It begins with a call that comes from beyond ourselves, the call that comes from our Lord Jesus Christ: "Fol-

low me” (Matt. 4:19). One of the best-known features of Jesus’ ministry is that he called certain individuals to follow him, to be his disciples.

Therefore, discipleship is an invitation both to a relationship and to a vocation. A relationship that is humble, vulnerable, and mutual, and finds itself growing in following Christ, in Christ’s own ways; in finding God at work in situations of strife and struggle; and in empowering people to resist and transform structures and cultures in the name of the triune God. It is, therefore, a vocation of collaborating with God for the transformation of the world.

The conference sought to hear this call afresh, to deepen our understanding of what it means in today’s context, and to engage ourselves more whole-heartedly and more comprehensively in the life of discipleship. Instead of being preoccupied with institutional conformity or with securing power and wealth for ourselves, we heard anew Christ’s call to take the risky path of following him. We have been stirred both to deepen our inward spiritual life and to express our discipleship in outgoing engagement with the world around us.

The conference asserted that discipleship is a vocation of transformation. It has the missionary character in that it is led by the Spirit to find God at work in contexts of time and space that are in need of transformation. First, the very idea of discipleship needs to be transformed. Discipleship is often understood merely in the sense of being a church member or practising personal piety. The conference sought to go further by thinking of discipleship as a matter of being actively engaged in continuing Jesus’ mission in the world. In Pope Francis’ phrase, we are called to be “missionary disciples.” This will involve us, in our local contexts, in stepping outside the walls of the church and living out our faith in the spaces of everyday life.

Secondly, we are called to be disciples who are constantly open to being transformed, individually and communally, in our following of Jesus. Discipleship commits us to embark on a spiritual journey and to adopt a way of life that reflects the Lord Jesus in our actions, words, and attitudes. As the Lausanne Movement’s Cape Town Commitment stated in 2010: “We need intensive efforts to train all God’s people in whole-life discipleship, which means to live, think, work, and speak from a biblical world view and with missional effectiveness in every place or circumstance of daily life and work.” The conference was conscious that in many contexts, “discipleship” is not a term in everyday use, and therefore sought language that might

help to explain what it involves. Being “Christ-connected” was a phrase that found resonance – living the whole of our lives in close connection with Jesus Christ. It is not shared ideals that unite us, but rather our connectedness to Christ, our living Saviour and Lord.

Third, we are called to be disciples who have a transforming effect, and as such we are privileged to join in the mission of the triune God, to move in the Spirit, to work together towards life, to live out the values of the kingdom of God, to engage in mission from the margins, and to humbly bear witness to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. True discipleship creates a movement of resistance and hope, countering the death-dealing forces of our time and discovering fullness of life.

Dhiloraj Ranjit Canagasabey, Anglican Bishop of Colombo, offered the conference a vision of the life of discipleship:

The discipleship which is cast on us at our baptism has both an internal and external dimension. Our inner, personal discipleship arises through our prayer life, our study of and reflection on the scriptures, through the sacraments and worship and through our sharing with fellow believers. We are additionally strengthened through our discipleship within our families and in our worshipping communities. This results in our discipleship in the footsteps of Jesus, bearing witness to the values of his kingdom in our communities, wider society, and in our nation.

Disciples Caring for Creation

To be worthy missionary disciples, we need to be open to the wonder and mystery of creation, transformed by its beauty and called to action by its suffering. God has given us the responsibility to care for the earth: its natural resources and our environment. We have much to learn from Indigenous people, who have demonstrated a greater level of respect for our Mother Earth, recognizing that pollution from the use of fossil fuels and other mineral extractions does not bring honour and is not beneficial to nature and the long-term survival of the inhabitants of the earth. If evangelism is to bring good news today, it needs to entail the *kenosis* that puts the long-term sustainability of the earth ahead of our own short-term comfort and convenience. As TTL states: “Humanity cannot be saved alone while the rest of the created world perishes. Eco-justice cannot be separated from salvation, and salvation cannot come without a new humility that respects the needs of all life on earth” (§23).

A significant gesture was made by participants in the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI), who made an important contribution to the conference. During their pre-conference programme, they planted 12 Mringaringa trees on the campus of the Tumaini University, Makumira – an activity dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the World Council of Churches. Another meaningful gesture was the reusable water bottles issued to conference participants, without which thousands of empty plastic bottles would have been left in Tanzania.

Disciples at the Margins

“Mission from the margins” was a key affirmation that was constantly heard and asserted throughout the conference. It indicated a paradigm shift in missiological discourse. “Mission from the margins” implies affirming the agency of those marginalized, participating in their struggles and sharing their hopes, overcoming the marginalizing tendencies, and resisting and confronting the forces of marginalization and exclusion in our specific contexts of the world. “Mission from the margins” can remain rhetoric if conscious attempts are not made to avoid patronizing the marginalized, imposing solutions from positions of privilege, power, and safety without entering into their life-worlds of suffering and struggle. Based on this premise, the idea of “transforming discipleship” inspired many creative articulations.

In an unjust and exclusionary world, the gospel of Christ continues to rise from the margins and challenge the mighty to lay down their power and make way for the coming of justice. The gospel of Christ breaks out from communities that are despised but that turn out to be the most important of all. To that extent, mission from the margins is not a mere option but an essential way of collaborating with God in today’s world. As TTL explains, those at the margins testify to the sinfulness of the world. Confronting and transforming the forces that marginalize and exclude people is an important aspect of Christian discipleship.

Indigenous peoples continue to suffer discrimination and exploitation at the hands of the powerful, yet their wisdom may hold the key to the future. Despite advances in gender awareness worldwide, women continue to be treated unequally and to suffer painfully at the hands of male power. Minority groups in many contexts experience discrimination, their culture and their very humanity treated with scant respect.

Through a message from the women's pre-conference event, the conference was made aware of how much remains to be done to achieve gender justice. In this regard, churches and mission agencies have often been culprits as they have omitted to recognize the huge contribution made by women in mission over many years.

The Indigenous youth held a pre-conference meeting that passionately called for the agency of marginalized people to be recognized. They also made the point that the oppression they experience has been highlighted many times before. Now it is time for the churches to act!

As the main speaker in the "Mission from the Margins" plenary, a young Indigenous woman asserted on behalf of all the Indigenous peoples:

I am Adi Mariana Waqa, I am poor, I am bound, I am unfavoured, I am oppressed! But I am a precious child made in the image of God. I have agency, I am worthy, I have a voice, and I am free! I am free because I live and walk in the Spirit! I am free and I joyfully bear God's good news and hope as Christ's disciple from the margins transforming the world. Thanks be to God!

Disciples Committed to Evangelism

Christ's call to discipleship has been distorted when responsibility for Christian witness has been delegated to professionals; baptism is a call to discipleship, and we are all called to follow the way of Christ in every dimension of our lives.

Across the world church we are living through a rediscovery of the reality that the mandate for evangelism is not restricted to any select group but is given to all disciples of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is from everyone to everyone, extending to all the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ.

When evangelism seeks conversion, it means change in the evangelist as well as the evangelized. It is not to be understood as manipulating someone else into my own likeness. Rather, together we are called toward new life in Christ, calling the whole creation to abundant life in inclusive community.

If we wish evangelism to be convincing today, the first thing we must do is to be disciples. Humility and sacrifice are urgently needed to liberate the gospel from captivity to projects of self-aggrandizement. The more we are true disciples of Christ, the more effective our evangelism will be.

Disciples Reaching across Religious Boundaries

The conference was impressed by the mutual respect and ease of interaction between different religious communities that prevails in many parts of Africa (and beyond). With sharp challenges to face at personal, communal, and national levels, in many contexts Christians have been creative in finding ways to work together across religious boundaries.

It is time to disown the model of evangelism as conquest and instead promote partnership, dialogue, and collaboration with believers of other religious traditions. It is time to redraw the boundary lines of religious differences so that they become way markers to peace, not battle lines for violence. “Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile” – the prayer of the Athens World Mission Conference in 2005 – is now more relevant than ever.

A comprehensive orientation to the mission of God calls for a welcoming and hospitable way of life that is affirmative and bridge building. People of other faiths are to be welcomed in the process of learning and formation. Interreligious encounters and the mutual learning they offer need to be a part of missional formation. Therefore, theological education and congregational learning processes need to be implemented in a manner that enables an integrated interreligious participation without compromising Christian identity.

Disciples Sensitive to the Trends of Secularization

Secularization is not a rejection of faith or being religious; rather, it should be regarded as a characteristic of the context in which both Christians and others view certain expressions of religious beliefs and practice. This has implications for the way in which mission is pursued today. Mission in secularized contexts requires sustained dialogue between Christian beliefs (gospel values) and the common convictions about life and the world. It also implies finding life-affirming allies, partnering for the sake of the common pilgrimage for justice and peace. In doing so, we celebrate and share the joy of Christ’s gospel in an invitational and respectful manner. Proclamation and discernment are interrelated and mutually dependent as a dual dimension of discipleship in such contexts.

On the other hand, in contexts where secular politics of public life are threatened by certain dominant religious beliefs and traditions that marginalize and violate the dignity and rights of religious minorities, transforming discipleship asserts freedom of religion or belief. It nurtures and supports

ideological struggles that promote just and inclusive expressions of common life. It does not call for desecularization to become Christians. Rather it seeks to identify the contours of salvation that have already been created by the Spirit, while also discerning life-denying forces and idols in every sphere of life.

Disciples Committing to Community

In a world that prizes individuality, at a time when society is increasingly atomized, and in a context where people are polarized by identity politics, Christ calls his disciples to community. Following him means moving away from a self-centred life to find fulfillment in generous self-giving—the way of Christ. The journey is one that transforms and shapes the lives of others; a journey not to be made alone, but together. Discipleship is not only vertical but also horizontal in its scope and expression.

In individualized societies, the perception of what is important and what is true is being shaped increasingly by personal experience instead of a transfer of tradition, knowledge, and facts. Therefore, the church must find ways to let people experience the importance and meaning of being disciples together. Of great importance are baptism and eucharist, both reminding people that they are part of the movement of God's Spirit in this world. Elites, distances, and divisions based on social constructs of power and privilege have no place in the community that God wants to create.

The Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) played an important role at the conference, bringing from its pre-conference meeting a deep concern for inclusion and an understanding that moving in the Spirit involves sensitivity to those who are not yet included. Overcoming cultures and practices of discrimination and exclusion that deny the dignity and rights of others was held forth as an important indicator of the work of the Spirit.

Too often, churches have been comfortable clubs for “people like us” and have been easily abused to assert the interests of one identity set against others. Today we urgently need churches that break down the dividing walls of hostility and practise radical hospitality, living out the reconciliation and unity promised by Christ and forged by the Spirit. Too often, churches have been inward looking and preoccupied with their own internal concerns. Today we urgently need churches that are mainly and foremost churches in mission – agents of the Spirit in the transformation of the world. All of this calls for formation, an intentional journey of becoming disciples together.

Disciples Modelling Leadership

Alongside the need to denounce the greed for power, wealth, and privilege in the life of our churches, the conference also pointed out the ways in which leadership is understood and exercised in our communities, churches, and Christian organizations. Unfortunately, some in our leadership structures today seem more preoccupied with privilege and power that come with their positions rather than with their calling to responsible stewardship. The conference asserted, “We are called to be formed as servant leaders who demonstrate the way of Christ in a world that privileges power, wealth, and the culture of money.”

Too often, the church has been moulded by prevailing patterns of the surrounding world, its leaders seeking power and wealth for themselves rather than modelling the sacrificial service seen in Christ. Today we urgently need church leaders who are, first and foremost, disciples, walking in the Spirit, forming and guiding communities that take the way of Jesus. Youth delegates reminded the conference of the importance of discipleship being worked out in real-life contexts.

Transforming discipleship in the spirit of mission from the margins creates for us a possibility to reset the ways in which we exercise power, share leadership, and organize our partnerships in mission. As leaders, it is important for us to grasp that we must disciple in the context of relationship. One reason Jesus had such a lasting impact on his disciples is that he lived his message before them daily. He was both message and method. By walking with Jesus, they saw how he lived his faith in the real world. He prayed before them. He fed the poor. He had compassion on the multitudes. He healed the sick. In other words, he lived the life that he wanted to reproduce in his disciples.

This vision of discipleship is geared to the formation of leaders who are equipped not only intellectually, but particularly at the level of spiritual discernment and personal transformation. It fosters a radical openness to the Spirit of God that finds expression in leadership marked by mutuality, reciprocity, humility, and interdependence. It provokes a radical openness to others that is life-affirming and profound in its integrity. This openness and humility have clear implications: respect, rights, and dignity are not denied on the bases of the cultures of domination, discrimination, and exclusion.

In today’s global context, there is a formation that presents a sharp challenge to Christian discipleship. The culture of money seeks to define and dom-

inate every aspect of human activity and every creature of God's world. It forms possessor-consumers to be compliant constituents of an economically constructed world. This formation influences both thought and behaviour. Capturing individuals and communities, it aspires to draw a comprehensive map of our human and ecological future. The human soul and human community are stunted by the institutionalization and amplification of greed in an unrestrained market society. The integrity and well-being of creation are directly and dangerously threatened. We must engage in a determined attempt to present, for this generation, a faithful alternative to the spiritual formation offered by the culture of money. This calls not only for prophetic critique but for practical local action to build an alternative economy, one that is just and sustainable.

A spirituality of resilience is at the centre of the theological and missional formation for discipleship. It requires the formation of communities of Christians that are resilient in the face of injustice, that are humble and courageous in persistently challenging the unjust system.

As the conference heard from Mutale Mulenga-Kaunda in its opening plenary:

The kind of resistance needed in the struggle against the life-denying forces requires that the followers of Jesus Christ are filled with the life-giving Spirit of God that alone can equip people with the necessary resources for transformative discipleship.... Disciples are formed through a process of belonging, believing, becoming, and participating in order to live out the mission of God as demonstrated through Christ's mission in the church.

Disciples Taking Up the Cross

Discipleship is a costly vocation. It is a matter of being broken and poured out for others in the service of mission. Where our ministries have become self-seeking, consumerist, and prosperity oriented, we need to hear anew Christ's call to take up our cross and follow him (Luke 9:23). We have far too often presented Christian vocation in ways that avoided disturbing the status quo and interpreted it as good behaviour of humility, resilience, servanthood, sacrifice, gentleness, cordial interpersonal relationships, and so on. Furthermore, it is risky because it involves confronting, exposing, and resisting such hostile forces as the rise of populist politics, the revival of racism and xenophobia, corporate greed, inequality and injustice in the global economy, renewed danger of nuclear warfare, and threats to the integrity of

the earth itself. Behind all of these forces are powerful vested interests that will not take kindly to being challenged. Transforming discipleship is not going to be cheap. It requires us to step out of our comfort zones.

The conference was reminded of the definition of missionary discipleship given by *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* in 1982: “The self-emptying of the servant who lived among the people, sharing in their hopes and sufferings, giving his life on the cross for all humanity – this was Christ’s way of proclaiming the good news, and as disciples we are summoned to follow the same way.”

Today, empires are striking back in new forms, with their own dictatorial requirements of allegiance to mammon, market, consumerism, militarism, sexism, racism, fascism, and fundamentalism. Bearing the cross implies a willingness to confront the logic of the empire and to lay down our lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: “when Christ calls a man [or woman] he bids him [her] to come and die.”

On its final day, the conference was reminded by His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, that this martyr path is a reality for many disciples today:

Christians face rejection in their societies. Severe forms of rejection lead to persecution where hatred is expressed in the forms of violence and the desire to exterminate. Christians throughout the world are victims of persecution; large numbers of Christian communities in all continents face persecution on a daily basis. It comes in different forms and varies greatly: it can be the lack of freedom of religious beliefs, or actively killing innocent children or families while they are peacefully praying or worshipping the Lord.

In our neighbourhoods and globally, there are examples of peaceful co-existence but also of interreligious intolerance, bigotry, violence, and persecution. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). The last thematic plenary, entitled “Embracing the Cross,” drew attention to the role of the Christian churches as peace builders in the midst of persecution and violence. Bringing hope might imply relief efforts, involvement in advocacy and development work, and actively supporting various forms of interreligious encounters, particularly among younger generations. Moreover, the conference sought answers to the question of what is a faithful response when our neighbours of another religion become targets of

hatred and violence? How are we called, as disciples of Christ, to embrace the cross for their sake?

As stated by a Lutheran theologian from the USA, Kathryn Mary Lohre:

There is a unique role ... for the churches to play. We are just beginning to understand that equipping disciples for mission and evangelism today must include not only religious literacy and interreligious competencies but also the courage and humility to embrace the cross for the sake of our neighbours of other religions and worldviews, and to defend them against discrimination, bigotry, racism, and violence, regardless of its source.

Moving in the Spirit as Pilgrims of Justice and Peace

We are led by the Holy Spirit to become pilgrims, journeying together, guided by the vision of God's reign of justice and peace. Through spiritual renewal in Christ, we are called and led to be agents of transformation. As we heard in the sermon preached by Collin Cowan at the Sending Service:

Jesus' calling of his first disciples was set in the context of the forces of empire that tempted him with popularity and pleasure over the principles of obedience and faithfulness to God. Jesus, having resisted the temptations, presented himself to the community as one not easily sold to the scandal of seduction. His call "Come, follow me" is a statement of rejection of the status quo, and a declaration of an alternative. It is an invitation to defy the established order, divesting oneself of all that is known and held dear, to participate in God's work of transformation.... being ready to go against the grain of culture, to confront power, challenge status quo and exemplify a lifestyle marked by courage to stand up for what is right and commitment to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

In its final plenary, after full discussion and debate, the conference adopted and issued *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*.

The Next Agenda

Through its diverse inputs from all across the globe – in the plenary sessions, the table talks, the warshas, and the Sokonis – the conference offered an excellent opportunity to reflect on the meaning and implications of mission and evangelism today and to engage in these in ways that are relevant and credible. It clearly showed that the churches' engagements in mission are truly an ecumenical enterprise when calling the Christian communities to adequately address, respond, and act together.

In the light of what has been heard, said, and expressed during the conference, the Harvesting Committee suggests the following as issues calling for sustained attention from the CWME in the coming years:

- Mission as transforming discipleship in light of the reception of the Arusha Call 2018.
- Mission from the margins as a paradigm for our time.
- Mission and evangelism in a multi-religious world.
- The relationship of mission, evangelism, and development work.
- The relationship of costly discipleship and Christian unity.

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”
(Galatians 5:25).

4.

INTRODUCTION TO “MISSIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION ON THE 2022 WCC ASSEMBLY THEME *CHRIST’S LOVE MOVES THE WORLD TO RECONCILIATION AND UNITY AND ONGOING WORK OF CWME*”

Background

During the May 2019 full commission meeting of the CWME in Helsinki, Finland, the structure of the commission was modified to better address its needs and concerns after the World Mission Conference in Arusha, Tanzania (2018). At its first meeting during the Helsinki meeting, a new working group was formed that, after some discussion, took the name “Theology for Mission.”

A purpose of a working group exploring the theology for mission is to examine the theological and missiological implications of the theme of the WCC’s 11th Assembly, “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity,” from the perspective of the CWME’s commitment to Christian transforming discipleship, mission from the margins, justice and peace, evangelism, and ecological integrity.

A few members of the working group worked with the initial draft by Stephen Bevans. Then, the entire working group met in Kerala, South India, in November 2019, at a time when division between Christian churches was causing significant and highly divisive tensions. The stay also included an invitation to visit a Dalit village and sit with the people and hear something of their story of bonded labour and living as landless people. These experiences challenged some assumptions the working group members brought into the process and reminded them of the consequences of sin and brokenness in the lived experiences of many in the world. It made them strive for a deeper reflection in their collective theology and their own personal discipleship. The final revision was a significant drafting effort led by Moderator Rob Hay and subsequently approved by the full CWME commission in its meeting in March 2021.

Key points

The theme for the WCC's 11th Assembly to be held in Karlsruhe in September 2022—"Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity"—is a statement that awakens the missionary imagination. The question might be asked: How does this movement of love take effect? The missiological exploration gives a clear answer: "By calling women and men to be disciples." In doing so, it demonstrates the missiological meaning of the assembly theme.

The study paper weaves together some seminal strands of recent ecumenical theology: the understanding of mission as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit found in *Together towards Life* (2012), the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace that was initiated by the WCC assembly at Busan (2013), and the call to transforming discipleship that was issued by the WCC World Mission Conference held at Arusha (2018).

- The text begins by drawing extensively from the gospels to offer an evocation of Christ's love.
- It proceeds to celebrate the converting power of Christ's love as it transforms individual women and men, challenges injustice, and cherishes the whole creation.
- It affirms and celebrates reconciliation as both the gift of God and the calling of Christ's disciples.
- It acknowledges that we have fallen short of the unity to which Christ calls us but maintains that new impetus toward unity is found in the love of Christ, which not only moves the church to unity but makes it a force for unity in the human community as a whole and indeed for the entire created order.
- It concludes on a prayerful and trinitarian note, seeking deeper experience of the Spirit's presence, deeper knowledge of Christ's love, and deeper commitment to God's mission.

The note of conversion and transformation rings out time and again in the document. It does not hide from ugly, unjust, and distressing realities but always faces them with confidence in the transforming power of the love of Christ. This power took effect through Jesus' identification with the marginalized, and this points the direction for our discipleship. The movement of Christ's love in the world is one in which we are called to participate—being transformed ourselves and becoming agents of transformation in the world

4. *Introduction to “Missiological Exploration on the 2022 WCC Assembly Theme Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity and Ongoing Work of CWME”*

around us. It is through such discipleship that the WCC assembly theme can become a reality in the world of our time.

The form of the document is geared to invite participation. Its poetic quality stimulates our imagination. Its creedal character lends itself to liturgy, to a communal affirmation of faith. Its missiological content lays out the lines along which we can live our lives within the movement of Christ’s love that means reconciliation and unity for the world.

Rob Hay

Moderator

CWME Working Group on Theology for Mission

STUDY PAPER: “MISSIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION
ON THE 2022 WCC ASSEMBLY THEME
*CHRIST’S LOVE MOVES THE WORLD TO
RECONCILIATION AND UNITY*
AND ONGOING WORK OF CWME”
(CWME Working Group on Theology for Mission)

In this paper

We offer a missiological exploration

Of the 2022 WCC Assembly Theme and the ongoing work of
CWME:

“Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity” by
calling women and men to be disciples.

The Assembly theme has mission at its heart and the continuing
work of the CWME around discipleship offers the means for
resourcing and enabling the ongoing pilgrimage that is mission.

God’s love in Christ is the reason for God’s mission

And God’s call in Christ through the Spirit

to women and men of faith

to share in God’s work

is the essence of Christian mission.

In what follows we will explore the Assembly Theme

Through many of the ideas offered in *Together towards Life,*

The Arusha Call to Discipleship,

And *The Arusha Conference Report.*

4. *“Missiological Exploration on the 2022 WCC Assembly Theme Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity and Ongoing Work of CWME”*

As transforming, missionary disciples

we move in the Spirit,

and are moved by Christ’s love:

Pilgrims on the road to justice and peace,

Pilgrims on the road to reconciliation and unity,

In solidarity with all creation

Led and inspired by children, women and men on the margins.

Christ’s love

Christ’s love is the love of God

poured out on all creation through the Holy Spirit

He is the “image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation”¹

In whom all things were created.

We see this love in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth,

Anointed by the Spirit from his baptism

Bringing good news to the poor,

Proclaiming freedom to those in bondage,

Healing to those who suffer.²

Christ’s love is *inclusive*.

It is for the whole of creation.

It is for all without exception

¹ Col. 1:15-16. See also Col. 1:17-23.

² See Luke 4:18.

We see this in Jesus' table fellowship, choosing to be with the marginalized and sinners

We see it in his encounters across gender, religious, cultural and national boundaries³

We see it powerfully in the stories he told.⁴

Christ's love is *merciful* and *reconciling*.

We see this in his story of the Loving Father.

We see this in his challenge to keep on forgiving and seeking a reconciliation.

We see this in his forgiveness at his crucifixion.⁵

Christ's love is *passionate*

We see this in his stories of the woman searching for a lost coin

And the shepherd searching for the lost sheep

We see this in his many healings.

We see this in his many exorcisms.

He came to cast fire on the earth, he said,

And longed for that fire to be kindled.⁶

Christ's love is *challenging*

He challenges the disciples and the rich young man to leave all and follow him.

³ Matt. 15:2-28; Matt. 8:5-13; Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 19:1-10.

⁴ E.g., Luke 7:36-50; Luke 14:15-24.

⁵ Luke 15:11-32; Matt. 18:21-35; Matt. 5:24; Luke 23:34.

⁶ Luke 15:1-10; Mark 1:21-28; Luke 12:49.

4. *“Missiologistical Exploration on the 2022 WCC Assembly Theme Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity and Ongoing Work of CWME”*

He challenges Martha to let Mary learn from him⁷

He challenges his followers to take up their cross daily

He challenges all who hear him not to store up earthly treasures.⁸

Christ’s love is *tender*.

He sees the widow in Nain and raises her son.

He has compassion on the hungry crowd in the wilderness.

He embraces lepers and gathers the children.

He hears the cry of blind Bartimaeus.

He weeps at the death of his friend Lazarus.⁹

Christ’s love is revealed most fully on his Cross

Seen by many as foolishness,

But for us the source of hope and sign of God’s power

For the redemption and transformation of the world,¹⁰

Seen partially now and fully at the return of Christ.

The cross compels a response¹¹

not a response compelled by force

but a response compelled by love.

⁷ Luke 10:38-42.

⁸ Luke 9:23; Matt. 4:18-25; Mark 10:17-31; Matt. 6:19.

⁹ Luke 7:11-17; Mark 6:34-44; Mark 1:41-42; Mark 10:16; Mark 10:46-52; John 11:33-36.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 1:22-25.

¹¹ 2 Cor. 5:14.

The cross of Christ is the epitome of Christ's love
That same love must characterize our discipleship
As we take up our cross daily and follow him.

Christ's love moves the world

The whole of creation responds to Christ's love in its very being,
Groaning as it awaits its liberation.¹²

Groaning under the weight of greed, hatred, oppression and
injustice.

Suffering irreparable harm signaled by climate change and
its effects

The world witnesses the rise of extremism, fascism and xenophobia

The oppression of the indigenous and the rejection of
the refugee.¹³

And yet when women and men encounter Christ's love, in their yearning
for justice, meaning, and intimacy

They begin to love him,
to love the world,
to love its people and all its creatures,
to love God,

With that same inclusive, merciful, reconciling, passionate,
challenging, and tender love.

Christ's love is a call for women and men to be loving in turn.

¹² Rom. 8:21-23.

¹³ John 16:33.

4. “*Missiological Exploration on the 2022 WCC Assembly Theme Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity and Ongoing Work of CWME*”

It is a call to transforming, missionary discipleship.

Christ’s disciples called and converted by Christ’s love,

in turn call the world to conversion and transformation

moving the world...

To “a Christ-connected way of life,”¹⁴

Imitating him by identification with the poor and vulnerable,

Growing in him by lives of sustaining prayer and loving service to the world and our neighbour¹⁵

To worship “the God of justice, love, and grace”¹⁶— rather than the false god of the market, money and “success”

To stand in solidarity with the marginalized,

recognizing their agency, sharing their passion for justice, and acknowledging their wisdom and dignity

To care for creation,

“in solidarity with nations severely affected by climate change in the face of a ruthless human-centered exploitation of the environment for consumerism and greed.”¹⁷

¹⁴ See “The Arusha Call to Discipleship,” in *Moving in the Spirit: Report of the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*, ed. Risto Jukko and Jooseop Keum (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2019), 2-4.

¹⁵ See Merlyn Hyde Riley, Bible Study 1 at the Arusha Conference, “Following Jesus: Becoming Disciples,” <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/bible-study-1-cwme-arusha-tanzania>; see also Stephen Bevans, “Transforming Discipleship and the Future of Mission: Missiological Reflections after the Arusha World Mission Conference,” *International Review of Mission* 107.2 (December 2018): 362–77.

¹⁶ See “The Arusha Call to Discipleship.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

To create just and inclusive communities,

Where there is no discrimination¹⁸

And where there is welcome for all

To ecumenical and interreligious dialogue,

Where people can meet one another as friends

respect one another as fellow pilgrims

and work together in common witness

To “break down walls and seek justice with people who are dispossessed from their lands”¹⁹

Following Christ’s example

To embrace the cross, challenging all “elitism, privilege, and personal and structural power”²⁰

And ultimately to repentance and forgiveness of sins,

Convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit.

These disciples offer to the world the possibility of redemption and transformation

¹⁸ See *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, WCC, September 2012 (particularly paragraph 59), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>; “Reflections on WCC 10th Assembly Theme,” WCC, 6 December 2012, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/just-and-inclusive-communities/reflections-on-wcc-10th-assembly-theme?searchterm=inclusive+communities>.

¹⁹ “The Arusha Call to Discipleship.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*

4. *“Missiological Exploration on the 2022 WCC Assembly Theme Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity and Ongoing Work of CWME”*

And call the world to live the life of resurrection, confident of the Gospel, confident of Christ’s love

They declare that we are an Easter people and alleluia is our song.

Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation

God offers the hope of reconciliation for all

Christ’s love is the agent and means of that reconciliation

And Christ has shared that ministry with us, his disciples – the reconciled ones.²¹

His work now is our work – ambassadors of reconciliation.²²

To share in his mission is to commit ourselves to the work of reconciliation.

Reconciliation with God,

Reconciliation with our wounded creation

Reconciliation in broken communities

Reconciliation in disordered selves.

The gospel to which we witness and preach

Has reconciliation at its very heart.

The good news that

In our divided, violent, and fragmented world

Reconciliation is a reality.

²¹ 2 Cor. 5:19-20.

²² 2 Cor. 5:20.

Reconciliation, however, is not cheap.²³

It is not about wronged, sinned-against people forgetting the past

Forgetting their pain, forgetting their wounds

Reconciliation, rather, is a miracle of grace.

It restores neither victims nor perpetrators to where they were before.

But makes both a “new creation.”²⁴

Scars never disappear.

But grace can take both sinner and sinned against, to a new place

Of dignity and strength

Of conversion and repentance

Even of restoration and relationship.

Christians come to this new place by participating in Christ’s suffering and victory.

Jesus’ death and resurrection is the ultimate act of reconciliation

A testimony that God is with humanity and all creation

His suffering a reminder that he knows and shares our pain.

Reconciliation in this world is never complete.

It will only be complete at the end of the ages

When there will be a new heaven and a new earth,

When God’s knowledge will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea,

²³ Rom. 3:23-25; Gal. 3:13-14; 2 Cor. 8:9.

²⁴ 2 Cor. 5:17.

4. *“Missiological Exploration on the 2022 WCC Assembly Theme Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity and Ongoing Work of CWME”*

And when God will be all in all.²⁵

Reconciliation is the work of missionary disciples

Who mediate and articulate God’s reconciling grace,

And so participate in God’s reconciling mission.

Christians who have been transformed themselves by God’s love and grace,

Moved by Christ’s love to commit themselves to this ministry of reconciliation.

Christ’s love moves the world to unity

On the eve of his passion and death,

When he showed us that his love was “unto the end”

Christ prayed for unity, “that the world might believe.”²⁶

That unity has eluded us

We Christians profess our love for Christ

Yet remain divided!

We preach the gospel of reconciliation

Yet witness to a divided, unreconciled church!

As disciples we are called to model unity

It is a mark of our authenticity.

²⁵ Rev. 21:1; Hab. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:28.

²⁶ John 17:20-21.

Authentic love for Christ,

Will move the church to unity

Authentic love for Christ

Will move the church to work for unity in the world

among nations, among cultures, among peoples, respecting
them and

protecting the planet

working for peace

working for justice

eradicating poverty

empowering the powerless

sharing wisdom

That unity is not uniformity.

Authentic unity revels in diversity

Authentic unity values equity

Authentic unity is not an easy option

Authentic unity commits itself to dialogue

Commits itself to respectful listening

Authentic unity is never satisfied with unity achieved

But presses on to deeper conversion to the other,

Deeper learning from the other

Deeper commitment to the other.

4. *“Missiological Exploration on the 2022 WCC Assembly Theme Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity and Ongoing Work of CWME”*

Dialogue is not simply listening, but engaging

recognizing each other

being vulnerable to one another

sharing one’s whole self in hospitality

co-creating a safe space for speaking and hearing

and a sufficient holding of anxiety and ambiguity.

Our unity will never be perfect in this age

But if we are moved by Christ’s love, we can be a promise

A sign

A sacrament

Of the coming unity of that day

When the unity of the Holy Trinity, glimpsed in the Holy Mystery,²⁷

Will pervade the universe,

And God’s purpose for creation will be at last fulfilled.

Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity

Moving the world in love to reconciliation and unity

Is God’s mission, incarnate in Christ, accomplished through the Spirit

It is in that mission that we,

As church,

As missionary disciples,

Participate.

²⁷ A reference to the eucharist—see Gayle Carlton Felton, *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* (Upper Room, 2005).

We pray for ever-deeper experience of the Spirit's presence

We pray for ever-deeper knowledge of Christ's love

We pray for ever-deeper commitment to God's mission

That the world may believe,

That the world may flourish,

And that all the creatures of the world might move together
towards life.

5.

SUMMARY POINTERS FOR “CONVERTING DISCIPLESHIP: DISSIDENCE AND METANOIA”

Why This Paper?

The paper sets out in detail the findings and directions as agreed by the CWME Working Group on Transforming Discipleship. It is written as a response to *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*, which reminds us that the “Holy Spirit continues to move at this time, and urgently calls us as Christian communities to respond with personal and communal conversion, and a transforming discipleship.”¹ Further, it challenges each of us to a more intentional commitment to be Christ embodied love in the world.

Having come away from the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha 2018 and working with the WCC’s commitment to widely share the fruit of the rich discussions and activities in which we engaged, the CWME Working Group on Transforming Discipleship undertook a process of distillation. As a result of this process of clarifying the direction of the Arusha Call, the working group has suggested segues that invite others into the discussion with the hopeful outcome of strong actions from/of transformative discipleship.

What Is the Paper About?

The working group was very much aware of the Arusha Conference theme, especially its reference to Galatians 5:25: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.” The discussions centred on the prime place of the Spirit in the workings of discipleship. Despite the confusion and uncertainty of life in this modern age, disciples are emboldened by the Holy Spirit and given the necessary courage to advance in whatever direction the Holy Spirit wishes us to take.

This study paper is about pointing persons to an understanding of the demands of contemporary discipleship. The overarching requirement of this discipleship is for it to be transformative and transforming.

¹ Risto Jukko and Jooseop Keum, eds, *Moving in the Spirit: Report of the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism* (Geneva: WCC Publications 2019), 2.

Moving in the Spirit is a concept to which contemporary disciples are being called to a renewed awareness. The reminder is being issued afresh that Christ's love moves the world.

Disciples are called upon to represent a Christ-like love to the world. It is through the movement of transforming disciples that the divinity of Christ will become more evident. Christ is challenging us to a way of life marked by love, such as set out in John 13:34-35. Christ's love compels us to be radical. It urges us to take up the mission of reconciliation and unity seriously (Eph. 1:10, 5:18-19).

To enhance an understanding of the present church and the role of transforming disciples, this study paper suggests a number of ideas, including the ones set out below:

- Christianity played a pivotal role in colonization and strong remnants of that past have travelled into the present. A major task of transforming discipleship is to self-critique and to take ongoing corrective actions.
- Discipleship calls for an examination and recognition of the different talents with which we are gifted. These talents are to be interwoven into the life and work of discipleship.
- Transformed disciples are being called to enter a new relationship with God, each other, and the earth. This point requires deep study and action because the whole of creation is groaning under shattered and inappropriate relationships. These broken relationships can be mended by the movement of the Holy Spirit.
- The statement sets out a biblical call for transformed disciples to be the visible and vulnerable body of Christ. In this way, persons can be taught to understand their own brokenness and that they too are being invited into the fullness of life that Christ brings.
- With regard to a spirituality of discipleship (dissident discipleship), there is a need for discipleship rooted in the Spirit of Jesus, not the spirits of the powers of this world.

To Whom Is the Paper Directed?

The study paper is directed to a wide readership, ranging from the membership of the WCC to well beyond these borders. The working style of the WCC incorporates and invites the presence and the participation of people of goodwill into a sharing of our papers and programmes. On this occasion, that same pattern is suggested. In a more specific sense, though, this paper is presented for use via regions, denominations, and congregations to assist their interrogation of this perspective on *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*. It also offers a guide for some concrete steps that could be taken with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Possible Uses

This paper is written to provide the scope and the space for a continued consideration of discipleship through avenues such as churches, seminaries, and workshops. The particular uses—including in Bible studies, programme planning, and visioning—will be determined in the particular context.

Jennifer Martin

Moderator

CWME Working Group on Transforming Discipleship

**STUDY PAPER: “CONVERTING DISCIPLESHIP:
DISSIDENCE AND METANOIA”
(CWME Working Group on Transforming Discipleship)**

Preface

The Transforming Discipleship Working Group of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (WCC) offers these reflections as an outworking of *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*. We are particularly mindful of the claim made in this Call that the ‘*Holy Spirit continues to move at this time, and urgently calls us as Christian communities to respond with personal and communal conversion, and a transforming discipleship*’. Discipleship has become a key issue across all levels of the Church, in our ecumenical work, our denominational work and our witness in communities. God seems to be challenging us to a more intentional commitment in response to His love revealed in Christ and the new world Christ embodies and invites amongst us now. Discipleship is key to effecting transformation in God’s body, the Earth and in Christ’s body, the Church.

Living in and leaving behind the colonially haunted Church ...

Any truly ecumenical envisioning of Christian discipleship needs to take into account Christianity’s part in colonizing violence and occupation. The shift of the center of Christianity to the global South and to communities from the global South in the global North, means we are shaped by the currents and legacies of enslavement, colonization and power. The era of colonial empires and their missions may have passed but the systems, disorder, attitudes and even some practices they created continue to dominate.

Mission, past and present, shows we have been creatures of love but also perpetrators of hate. Violence and hatred of people has been “baptized” against those who don’t conform to “our” norms, or those whose lands and lives become expedient for the growth and profit of colonial powers or indeed of the church itself. This has been done to the peoples of the earth, and also to the earth herself. This critique can be applied to churches and Christian agencies engaged in mission, but also it can be said for congregations in their local communities. This is a spirit and praxis in discipleship which needs to be exorcised and converted.

This is to critique Western colonial missionaries who used imperial expansion as a means to Christian expansion and in proclaiming Christ, rather

asserted the “salvific”, “civilizing” power of Whiteness and a White Christ. Mission is now understood to be from everywhere to everywhere. Missionaries are sent from all nations, especially the “global South”. But, many missionaries from the South are still in the “colonial” mode perpetuating certain forms and norms of Christianity. The old ways of offering financial inducement, privilege in leadership, “love” dependent on conversion, promise of future blessing and the benefits of a superior faith and civilization are still the core evangelism tactics of these “new” missionaries. In this way the discipleship paradigm of White Supremacy has morphed into “Christian supremacy” and ensured Christian discipleship and mission behaves as a colonial force.

The history and testimony of those churches who grew up in this era, remind us that the seeds of the Gospel planted by Western missionaries grew as a result of the nurturing work of indigenous hands, these were often the true agents of mission in the colonial era. In the face of colonial power, disciples of all nations, came forward who recognized in Jesus the one who could lead them, their people, their land, indeed the whole inhabited earth to liberation and peace. This reminds us that the Gospel has a power and a horizon which is greater than the limitations imposed by those who proclaim it. It has the power, like Jesus, to confound power.

Confounding Empire and its unloving and unlovely church

Luke 9 unmasks the ways disciples are tempted to violence. In a chapter focusing on the calling and meaning of discipleship, James and John, desire to destroy a Samaritan village which refuses to give them hospitality (Luke 9:54). They expect Jesus to approve of this and sanction it, but instead He reproves them, tells them they don’t know what Spirit they are from (Luke 9:55).

It is not hard for us to hear this judgement placed on we “James and Johns” today. Some people of no faith and all faiths discern in the heart of churches not love, but hate. They conclude we belong to a different spirit to the one we claim, that we are moved not by the love of Christ but by phobias and prejudice, which far from inviting reconciliation and unity, create the conditions for violence and division. This is all the more troubling because there are wider political powers manipulating this and profiting from it.

But, yet the Spirit of Christ is moving. Amongst the disciples who follow James and John are those who are more like Mary and Martha, of whom we can see faithful, honorable and credible love. There are many in our

movements and churches who embody the vision, wisdom and spirit Christ breathes on those He calls to be the means to forgiveness and liberation.

Christ is at work, meeting and making disciples amongst all kinds of places and peoples, so we have hope. The Spirit is active inside and outside church challenging us to become the people God calls us to be. Marginalized communities are claiming Jesus's presence in the church for themselves, turning upside down the world and the church. Indigenous communities are reclaiming the epistemologies and spiritualities of their peoples, land and histories to release Jesus from this colonizing past. Immigrant church communities flourish with the hope and joy of the Gospel, in the face of racism and xenophobia. Peoples whose caste, ability, sexuality or gender make them targets of religious violence gather in communities which show they are beloved by God and responding to His love. Historic churches, declining in many places, are being renewed in life and spirit by migrant communities faithful to the call Jesus has placed on them for centuries. The margins are coming to renew the church as a sign of God's mercy. This is Magnificat breaking out from below, showing where the Church is and should go.

Disciples in new relationship with God, each other, and the earth

Our confession invites a metanoia, a new orientation and direction. As we look to leave behind a colonial and chauvinistic church, we see the way open through a spirit of interculturality, marked by an ethos of open-ness, hospitality and vulnerability. Perhaps in this way the world might discover a church which is loving and lovely, like Christ.

Embracing the image of God in the other, embracing the earth as beloved by God will turn our world, churches and discipleship upside down. It will profoundly remodel us on Christ's incarnation, who is the very embodiment of interculturality, by which creation and creator become revealed to each other in a spirit of love.

Interculturality gives us an ethos for living out an authentic repentance for the hurts and hatred to which we are party. Interculturality brings the oppressed and oppressor together in a way which realizes Jesus' vision of the first being last, and Mary's song of Magnificat in which the humble are uplifted, and all are released into the world of God's radical grace. This means

intentional action. It is not enough to be 'not racist', for example, we need to be anti-racist. It is not enough to lament the harm we do to the earth; we must live now in ways which bring her ease and healing.

A Biblical call into being the visible vulnerable body of Christ

Jesus' incarnational - intercultural model lays aside power and privilege and promotes humility (Phil. 2:6–8). How can the *ekklesia* model this? Or do we think it does not apply to our bodies, powers and privileges? Having allied ourselves so deeply with Christendom and mission as the extension of Christendom, our conversion must be seen in resisting the Christendom temptation to want power and influence and impose one form of Christianity. This means we must name and know our history and make reparation for it.

As we look to be the Body of Christ after Christendom, we look the models of the church before Christendom. We can see dimensions in the early church communities we meet in Acts and the Epistles.

Disciples living distinctive lives in resilient communities: Acts 4:32–33 shows us how the early Church lived under Empire. They found and shared in each other the spiritual and material resources to live out a world seen through the promise of the Magnificat.

Disciples defining life in God's service as embodying love: Paul outlines to the Christian community at the very heart of Empire that their new life in Christ was centered on love. Romans 12:9–20 advocates an empathetic spirituality to guide disciples in their work and witness. In these human ways a divine ethos is enacted.

Disciples who are citizens of the coming new world: We live under powers and principalities constantly discipling us into their values and purposes. Christian communities seek to live out the counter claim of their faith that Jesus is Lord and find in each other the counter community with Christ at its heart, not Caesar. Roman critics despised the early church because it was made up of the "dregs of society", typically women, children and slaves. Ephesians 2:19–20 reminds communities made up of the *hoi polloi* that they are citizens of heaven. Disciples live at the margins of empire, signifying the borders into a new world, and thus cannot, in integrity, re-center themselves in the halls and heart of empire. In this way we can transform discipleship by decolonizing and de-centering it.

Moving in the Spirit

Spirituality of dis(sident)cipleship

There is therefore the need for discipleship rooted in the Spirit of Jesus, not the spirits of the powers. This is to step forth in courage, living out a distinctive and authentic love, sounding a dissident note in the many beguiling and compelling melodies of empire.

The dynamics of discipleship

Called into personhood

Discipleship begins with the call of Jesus. This call is not into an existing ecclesial identity but into a new creation which is the realization of our humanness (2 Cor. 5:17). This is what is life-changing, especially for those who find their humanity denied or defined by dominant powers. This counter-identity forges a dignity in which we can stand against those who oppress.

Sent into new/counter peoplehood

As we respond to His call, Jesus sends us into new relationships with God, each other and the earth. What begins in the personal and private finds its fresh direction through the communal and public. *Personhood* gives way to *peoplehood*. Disciples are thus part of a movement seeking, through love, the power to transform the public and political realities of the world.

Leaving behind the whitewashed tombs

Discipleship means leaving behind the systems and certainties which claimed us thus far. Stepping out of political and religious systems and disputing their dominant claims. Jesus' call contests the prior calls of all religious and political power. Discipleship is a dissident act. As Jesus renews His disciples so we are to reform the living stones of our traditions.

Travelling companionably with those God sends

Jesus is not raising a conquering army. His is a movement of companions meeting Jesus all of a sudden on the road. Jesus comes to these pilgrims in many forms and moments. Especially in the bodies of those empires despise (Matt: 25:43) and in the moments which feel like defeat and despair (Luke 24:13ff).

Embodying love and creating change

We are pilgrims living out the Psalms of ascent moving from despair (Ps. 120:1) till we come through the night into a dawn of blessing in God's pres-

ence (Ps. 134:1) This is made visible in the love we show and the change we invite in the face of injustice and wrong.

Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity

The love of Christ is Trinitarian as it is a reflection of the love that is shared among the three persons of the Holy Trinity. God is love in the triune form. This implies that only when love is shared it becomes divine and Christ-like. The Trinity’s love that is characterized by perichoresis, is the basis of our love of God, love for one another and love for creation, a discipleship that is transforming. Christ is challenging us to a way of life, marked by love, John 13: 34–35. In a world that is increasingly being formed and conditioned by an overwhelming ideology and culture of fear of and hatred for the other, the theme invites us to radical action, to MOVE the world, move it upside down as the early disciples of Jesus did. Christ’s Love compels (2 Cor. 5:14) us to be radical. It urges us to take up the mission of reconciliation and unity (Eph. 1:10; 5:18–19) seriously.

The kind of reconciliation and unity that Christ’s Love challenges us with is not mere conciliation or shallow unity but a costly one. Christ’s Love, exemplified on the Cross, brought forth genuine reconciliation and unity by destroying the walls that were divisive and discriminatory (Eph. 2:14–15). In other words, it is the presence of justice that gives reconciliation and unity its Christological content. The Word becoming flesh was Love expressing itself in justice. Mere love devoid of justice is not Christ’s Love. Transforming discipleship then is about translating the love of Christ into justice in a world that is marred by forces of injustice and hatred. A world that is moved (upside down) by the love of Christ would be a world of authentic unity and reconciliation, a just world, an expression of the reign of God.

The Triune God asserted sovereignty over Creation and history in the life, death, resurrection, and promised second coming of Jesus - as a baby, yet Ruler of all; as a crucified criminal, yet Ruler of all; as a single human being in a moment of time, yet the destiny of all the ages. This profound contradiction of the values and ideals of the rulers of this age, is the revealing power and pattern of our discipleship. In it, we not only see our way, in Creation and history, we also behold, as if in our peripheral vision, the trajectory of the Word of God - in the will of the Father and the power of the Spirit - in Creation and history.

Seen especially in his baptism, the mystery of the life, death, resurrection, and promised second coming of Jesus unveils the divine presence in Cre-

ation. This living reality, the active divine presence in every particle of Creation, reveals the sacramental reality of our Created life and, at the same moment, displays the way our humanity is unbreakably entwined with the life and health of all Creation. Our discipleship in Jesus, therefore, is found to be in a struggle with the materialistic reductionism of much modern thought, the partner of the ecologically abusive patterns of the globally metastasizing culture of money.

The singular expression of God in Jesus reveals sacrificial love to be the pattern of life in all Creation. It is not only a moment in salvation history, it is the unfolding of salvation history. As such, it is the pattern of life entrusted to us who have been born anew in baptism. As sacrificial love is the heart of Creation and the unique sign of the World to Come, lack of love, Jesus tells us, is the product and unique sign of a world of injustice and evil (Matt. 24:12). Our endurance in the face of the evil that captivates the rulers of this age is, above all else, the endurance of sacrificial love.

We should understand, then, that Jesus has chosen to assert His presence and sovereignty, in this time of waiting, in the margins of this age. Promising a special presence in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, He says, if you wish to find me, you will find me there. It is there that He promises to meet us in a special way; it is there that the World to Come is born; it is there that our discipleship finds its true home.

God of justice and love:

Move us to reconciliation and unity!

6.

INTRODUCTION TO “REIMAGINING MISSION FROM THE MARGINS”

One of the gifts of the 2012 WCC mission statement is the concept of “mission from the margins.” The concept called for a new and liberating way of reimagining the locus and understanding of the *Missio Dei* and at the same time of addressing the systems of power and the imbalance between perceived “centres” and “margins.” The concept has captured the imagination of theologians, missiologists, and mission leaders. It has been the hope that the concept would initiate not just a transformation of missiological thinking but also a reshaping of the programmatic life of ecumenical instruments and agencies. This goal remains a work in progress.

In as much as the concept has received much praise, it remains a very contested concept. Experience has demonstrated that some segments of the church and ecumenical movement are still struggling to understand the concept. The dominant approach of mission “with,” “to,” and “at” the margin is often subsumed under the notion of mission “from” the margins.

Following the WCC’s Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha (2018) and in preparation for the next WCC assembly (2022), it became evident that we need to rearticulate the vision of engaging in mission from the margins. The concept paper “Reimagining Mission from the Margins” was drafted by David W. Scott and Jerome Sahabandhu (United Methodist Church, USA). It is intended to provoke conversation to deepen the understanding and implications of the concept. The paper provides a robust conversation on the theme of theologizing from the margins. The authors remind us that “those on the margins read the Bible with the eyes of vulnerability and resistance, poverty and resilience, powerlessness and empowerment of the spirit.” The text underscores the need to appreciate the contextual nature of theology and its liberating impact.

The paper offers five critical themes that the reader will appreciate. Given the length of the paper, these themes are offered to spark imagination and discussion that can and should help us take the concept of mission from the margins seriously.

Firstly, the paper highlights the multifaceted and intersectional complexity of centres and margins. As Scott and Sahabandhu note, “It is insufficient to

understand center and margins in simple, one-dimensional terms that focus on either wealth or geography.” In exploring the complexity, the paper invites us to consider the notion of marginalization. This discussion allows the reader to begin to wrestle with the reality of marginalization and to imagine ways to engage in missional discernment.

A second feature of the paper is the section titled “The Agency of the Margins.” The authors note that “the essential element of the agency of the people at the margins is the capacity and skill they possess to analyze the society in which they live. Those on the margins are capable of critical social analysis for the transformation of the whole.” This is an important idea for consideration. It moves the reader from romanticization of the margins or a paternalistic approach to margins to a healthy consideration of how the people at the margins have contributed to an understanding of the wholeness of life.

Thirdly, the paper offers a beginning of a conversation on the relationship of the concept of “mission from the margins” and development practices. It invites development agencies to take seriously the intersectional and contextual nature of marginality. Clearly, more discussion and work are to be done in this area. The relationship of “mission from the margins” to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and to practices that create dependencies and conversation without those impacted are some of the ongoing dialogues that is needed. This paper offers a starting point.

Fourthly, the paper offers a critical lens in its reading of *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*. While it affirms the Arusha Call, it also points to a couple of areas requiring a deeper conversation of two issues identified: justice and incarnation. This section is incomplete, but again it is meant to stimulate conversation and consistency in our understanding of the contribution of the margins to the work of mission and engagement of the Spirit in the enterprise of mission.

Finally, the paper challenges us to consider what it calls a “transformational approach” to engaging mission from the margins. It invites discernment, affirmation, and partnership.

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**STUDY PAPER:
"REIMAGINING MISSION
FROM THE MARGINS" (CWME Working Group
on Mission from the Margins; drafted by
Dr David W. Scott and Rev. Dr Jerome Sahabandhu)**

Introduction

When *Together towards Life* (TTL) was released, one major theme that provoked much conversation and interest was the document's discussion of mission from the margins. This concept was one of four central ways in which the document described the work of the Holy Spirit in mission.

Yet since the WCC Central Committee meeting in Crete in 2012, even before the release of TTL, the concept of 'mission from the margins' (MfM), has been contested. In adopting TTL, the hope was that the concept of engagement with "marginal communities" within the WCC and its member churches would have an impact not only on their programs but on their governance structures. However, the concept of mission from the margins has not been fully developed following its inclusion in TTL. At the World Mission Conference in Arusha it became evident that there was need for further clarification of the concept.

Mission from the Margins remains one of the most challenging yet generative theological and missional themes in the church today, especially in (but not limited to) the ecumenical movement. The worldwide church has struggled to understand mission from the margins. In particular, those portions of the church that operate out of contexts of privilege have yet to find their place within this movement of the Spirit. Thus, as the WCC prepares for its next Central Committee Meeting in March 2020 and Assembly in 2021 [situation before postponements; Ed.], it seems an appropriate time to offer some further reflections on the meaning and practice of mission from the margins. The desire in doing so is to help the WCC and CWME live into the reality envisioned in this concept.

The Current Programmatic Approach

Too often, the phrase "mission from the margins" has been used to justify an approach to mission that still foregrounds the actions and agency of those with various forms of privilege. Mission from the margins is often used to

support the programmatic work of wealthy parts of the church with poorer parts of the church. When used in this way, mission from the margins can represent a sincere and sometimes successful attempt to move past modes of mission that “have often been directed *at* people on the margins of societies” and “have generally viewed those on the margins as recipients and not as active agents of missionary activity” (TTL #41). When those with privilege engage in mission *with* those at the margins rather than *to* them, this is a worthwhile shift.

Yet any understanding of mission that still focuses primarily on the actions of those at the center(s) cannot truly be an expression of mission from the margins. Mission from the margins affirms that “The marginalized in society are the main partners in God’s mission.” (TTL #107) Mission from the margins is first and foremost about the agency and actions of those at the margins, which seldom take the form of well-resourced programs.

The church has for generations spoken of mission *to* the margins and mission *with* the margins and even mission *at* the margins. Now the church is speaking, though very uncomfortably at times, about mission *from* the margins. That means marginalised communities have a mission to the church and the world. That mission is now challenging the centers of power and empire, wealth and prosperity, social status and class, militarism and defence, politics and cultural imperialism.

Thus, as we seek to better understand the concept and practice of mission from the margins, we must ask how we move beyond understandings of the term that is still primarily about the actions of those at the center to clearer understandings of the concept and a deeper awareness of the place of both the marginalized and the privileged within this framework.

Understanding the Margins

A deeper understanding of mission from the margins that highlights the actions and agency of the marginalized must begin with a clearer sense of who the marginalized are in our world. While TTL “calls for an understanding of the complexities of power dynamics, global systems and structures, and local contextual realities” (37), it is these complexities that perhaps most need to be fleshed out from TTL’s own discussion of mission from the margins. In particular the contextual, multifaceted, intersectional and contested nature of margins and marginalization must be stressed.

It is insufficient to understand center and margins in simple, one-dimen-

6. *“Reimagining Mission from the Margins”*

sional terms that focus on either wealth or geography. Certainly, wealth vs. poverty is one important and central dimension of center and periphery. It is also true that legacies of colonialism and global free market capitalism have inscribed unjust differences in wealth between the West and the majority world. Yet an understanding of center-margins as only or even primarily about a rich Western center and poor Eastern and Southern margins oversimplifies the concept of mission from the margins.

This is true first because of the multifaceted and intersectional nature of centers and margins. While wealth is an important form of privilege that creates centers and margins within human community, it is far from the only one. Differences in power and knowledge also create centers and margins. Social status can create centers and margins in myriad ways, including along lines of gender, race, ethnicity, tribe, ability/disability, age, and socioeconomic status within a society. Margins exist within nearly every human category: locally, globally, within the church, within socio-economic groups, and within the political sphere. A sophisticated understanding of mission from the margins must take into consideration all these (and more) potential dimensions of marginality.

Moreover, these varying dimensions of marginality intersect in complex ways. Thus, a person or group may be marginalized along one dimension but privileged along another. Or their marginality may be compounded along several dimensions. The concept of intersectionality describes these complex intersections of varying dimensions of privilege and marginality. A full understanding of mission from the margins must therefore consider the intersectionality of identities that create centers and margins.

Furthermore, whether examined from the perspective of theology or sociology, marginalization is contextual. While Western nations have more wealth than majority world nations, there are also significant differences of wealth within nations that create internal centers and margins. Indeed, even within individual cities, there are centers of wealth and margins of poverty. The same can be said of other dimensions of centrality and marginality. Differences within power, knowledge, social status, spiritual vitality, and other dimensions of privilege manifest in unique ways in each context. Moreover, the ways in which these different dimensions of privilege intersect is unique to each context as well. A full understanding of mission from the margins must therefore always be a contextual understanding.

To give one example of how these concepts of intersectionality and contex-

tuality come together, although Europe as a whole for the past several centuries has functioned as a center to which the rest of the world is periphery, a relatively well-to-do (by local standards), middle-aged, male, academic from Ghana is in many ways and in many contexts less marginalized than a poor, young, Roma girl living in Bulgaria. However, both are marginal compared to other groups (the Ghanaian relative to Western academics, perhaps, and the Roma girl relative to Bulgarian society as a whole). Thus, the actions of either may be considered mission from the margins, at least within certain contexts.

Because of the intersectional and contextual nature of margins, margins are also contested spaces. Different groups and individuals will have divergent understandings of their own marginalization and the marginalization of other groups and individuals within a particular context. In some instances, some people that others consider marginalized may not see themselves in that way. In other instances, some people that others see as at the center according to some aspect of identity may actually feel marginalized because of another aspect of their identity. The point is not that there is one right way to understand center and margins, but rather that understanding marginalization is a complex, ongoing, iterative, and dialogical process of discernment.

Despite its complexities, it is clear that systemic marginalization of communities around the world has increased rapidly in recent years due to capitalism, militarization, racism, perceived cultural superiority and socio-political victimization. People are marginalized in a globalised world of communication explosion. Peoples' dignity has been ignored, turning entire communities into expendable crowds to be used in service of profitability and consumerism. The church must discern whether we participate in this by marginalizing others, even while some parts of the church are composed of marginalized people themselves.

While the existence of centers and margins raises important issues of justice, it is not marginalized people who are the problem; it is the process of their marginalization that is the problem. While that process of marginalization is to be condemned, marginalized people are to be affirmed at every step. Often, voices from the margins are unheard and unheeded. Recognition of those on the margins and listening to the margins are vital aspects of the missional discernment that we must regain in modern missional praxis.

Theologizing Mission from the Margins in the Context of the *Missio Dei*

Theologies emerging from the margins are always powerful, challenging, and transformative. The global church has a responsibility to discern, listen and partake in these theologies from the margins. Doing so calls the church to an incarnational missional response, solidarity with others and partaking in a new mission praxis.

A key question about theology is, "Who has the power and wisdom to theologize?" In the past, it was usually those in the West, those deemed to be most powerful, or those with theology degrees that were assumed to possess the power and authority to theologize. Furthermore, those deemed to have power to theologize believed that they could define the context, issue or problem on others' behalf. They considered people whose voices went unheard or who lived in the margins to be unskilled or to have no capacity or language to theologize.

This is absolutely a mistaken approach. In fact, those at the margins are the most qualified and empowered to share their experiences and theologize. Theological reflection should not be taken out of the specific context from which it emerges. Theology should come from a given life context (*sitz-im-leben*). People in the margins have experiential wisdom and experiential spirituality. They possess moral power which emerges from their experiences in the context of the margins.

Those on the margins read the Bible with the eyes of vulnerability and resistance, poverty and resilience, powerlessness and empowerment of the Spirit. This is a unique perspective and very different from reading the holy texts from positions of socio-economic, political or ecclesial power. The marginalized will bring radically fresh perspectives and create a new space in our biblical reflection, hermeneutical wisdom sharing and praxis. Our biblical theology and hermeneutics should be open to a critical transformation from this kind of wisdom sharing.

Those on the margins also read and interpret history from a unique perspective. This is also a very important and significant aspect of theologizing. History has for centuries been written from the patriarchal and victors' perspectives. Historical reading from the margins brings radically fresh perspectives to the mission of the church.

Most people in the margins have a great faith in a liberating God, in a redeeming Christ, and in a sustaining and energizing Holy Spirit. They have faith that things will be changed and transformed. Their faith affirms the idea that another world is possible. Often when privileged or comfortable people go in mission, they are challenged by the faith of those in the margins. The faith of the margins can really touch and even revive the whole church's faith and hope. That faith can bring change, renewal and even radical transformation to lives, social structures and the church. That faith can bring communities to dream of a new future reigned over by God.

Theologies from the margins are thus theologies of life, especially in the transformation of the world. All theology should ultimately lead to life enhancement and empowerment, life affirmation and sustainability, life celebration, and life together. Any theology that is not committed to the affirmation of life cannot be an authentically Christian theology. Thus, others can join in with this theological learning process that begins at the margins and grow together.

If we believe mission is God's mission (*Missio Dei*) and that this mission is ongoing, then we all are called to join in that mission and become active participants. It is God's very self who has a mission from the margins. Here God is the author and perfecter of that mission, empowering all – both the powerful and the forgotten – for that mission. God is actively involved in the margins and from there is moving to the center and to everywhere for the sake of transforming the world and creating a new heaven and a new earth.

From the perspective of the *Missio Dei*, God endows capacities, gifts and graces to all at the margins. God is already there with the margins. Christ, who came into the margins of Galilea, still today makes himself incarnated in every new context of the margins. The Holy Spirit is always empowering the margins throughout history with power and agency, which builds confidence, resiliency, engagement and praxis of the margins. We celebrate the maternal Father, liberating Son and energizing Spirit in trinitarian community, which abides and sustains within marginal communities.

The Agency of the Margins

Agency is the capacity and power to bring change and transform the peoples, systems, and structures of the world. When people have the power of agency, they become catalysts and agents of change. Usually those who are in the position of power undermine or undervalue the agency that abides

6. "Reimagining Mission from the Margins"

within the margins. But that is a mistaken understanding. Agency does not depend on financial or political power, but instead in building confidence and faith in a transforming and living God who preferentially opted to be with the margins.

The essential element of the agency of the people at the margins is the capacity and skill they possess to analyze the society in which they live. Those on the margins are capable of critical social analysis for the transformation of the whole. God, who is in mission, empowers the margins to do so.

Moreover, those on the margins are now more organised and engaged than in the past in dialoguing, networking and coordinating their movements at the grassroots levels locally, regionally and globally. Marginalized people have organised at the level of praxis. There we observe new energy in the convergence of social margins. This convergence is a very significant aspect of mission from the margins.

Powerful movements from the margins have emerged in social contexts around the world. They have lifted up the voices of the poor, women, indigenous peoples, ethnic and racial minorities, outcastes, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. Some powerful movements for healing and reconciliation have come about from either post-conflict or post-war situations, such as in Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. Many eco-justice movements have emerged as movements from the margins with a commitment to justice for both the people and the environment. It is our call to recognize these movements in our own contexts. The key question here is about where the church stands and with whom it lives in solidarity.

People at the margins have unique gifts and assets to share with the world, including the church, especially gifts of the spiritual and moral power that sustains the margins. This power manifests itself through spiritualities that emerge from vulnerability, resiliency and hope, and lead to a capacity for dreaming of a better future. This aspect of agency sustains them towards active hope rather than in passive waiting.

Towards a Transformational Approach

The global body of Christ is called to be in the posture of discerning the movement of God among the margins and making a creative, transformative response. Affirmation of the marginalized and the ways in which they carry out the *Missio Dei* is at the heart of this response.

Mission from the margins is not an attempt to persuade or mobilize the marginalized in their mission work. Instead, it is an affirmation “that marginalized people are agents of mission and exercise a prophetic role which emphasizes that fullness of life is for all” (TTL #107). The response to the concept of mission from the margins by the marginalized should be to continue in the ways in which they are already engaged in mission with renewed assurance of the value of their participation in the *Missio Dei* and increased confidence that the Holy Spirit is able to work through them.

Yet while mission from the margins stands as a phrase of affirmation for those on the margins, it stands as a phrase of challenge and promise for those at the center(s). The concept of mission from the margins challenges those at the center to discern, affirm, repent, and join in, while promising more fullness of life for all, including those at the center.

For those at the center, mission from the margins first involves a challenge to discern where God is working at the margins. TTL begins with a challenge to “discern God’s life-giving work that enables us to participate in God’s mission today” (1). Those with privilege are called to learn from those at the margins about how they understand the life that God gives and how they struggle to enhance, affirm, and celebrate that life. Those at the center must be willing to have their own understandings challenged in this process. TTL recognizes that “[t]he Holy Spirit works in the world often in mysterious and unknown ways beyond our imagination” (TTL #15). For those at the center, the participation of those at the margins in the *Missio Dei* may be mysterious and beyond their imagination!

Part of the challenge to those at the center to discern how the Spirit is at work among the marginalized is a challenge to listen to and affirm what those at the margins are saying. As TTL asserts, “People on the margins ... can often see what, from the centre, is out of view. ... people in positions of privilege have much to learn from the daily struggles of people living in marginal conditions.” (38) The practice of listening to and learning from those at the margins is often an unfamiliar and difficult one for those at the center. The voices of those on the margins are often lost or unheeded by those in the centers. Hence, this call to affirm the voices of those at the margins stands as a challenge to recognize and respect previously marginalized voices.

Once those at the center have listened and understood the voices of those at the margins, they will often find the Holy Spirit calling them to repentance

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for their roles in and support of systems of marginalization. As TTL says, “The cross calls for repentance in light of misuse of power and use of the wrong kind of power in mission and in the church.” (33) The marginalized can see when those at the center have misused their power or used the wrong type of power. Thus, when those at the center listen to those at the margin, they are challenged to repentance.

It is only after this process of discernment, affirmation, and repentance that the privileged are then called to exercise their agency by joining in with what the marginalized are already doing. The privileged “must turn [their] direction of mission to the actions that the marginalized are taking.” (TTL #107) If, however, the preliminary steps of discernment, affirmation, and repentance have not occurred, then any attempt by the privileged to join the marginalized is likely to lead to an exercise of domination over the marginalized rather than their affirmation and support. The privileged must first prepare themselves to join in God’s mission in a kenotic, self-emptying way, as laid forth in TTL #62.

Yet when those at the center do join in God’s mission as carried out by those on the margins in this kenotic, self-emptying way, they experience more fully the abundance of life in the Spirit. The abundance of life promised through mission from the margins is not just for those at the margins, but for those at the centers, too. Joining in the work of God’s Spirit through mission from the margins also allows those at the center “to taste life in its fullness” (TTL #34) by “shar[ing] life at God’s table” (TTL #30).

It is also important to note that the global body of Christ has the challenge of responding to the work of God at the margins not only at a global level, but primarily at the very local level where most communities of the margins are encountered in mission and ministry. The body of Christ which exists at the local level is called to be sensitized and conscientized in order to generate appropriate missional responses. This is a pastoral task of the church.

MfM and Development Practices

Mission from the margins applies not only to congregational life, but also to the development, diaconal, and charitable work of church bodies. What might a kenotic, self-emptying mission of accompaniment and affirmation of the marginalized look like specifically within the realm of development and diaconal practices?

Above all, development agencies seeking to be informed by mission from the margins must take an appreciative approach to the materially poor. Such an approach must include a serious attempt to understand their situation of poverty through their own eyes along with acknowledgement and affirmation of the ways in which the poor take initiative to manage and even overcome their own poverty. There are various models of this type of approach, including asset-based community development and appreciative inquiry.

An appreciative approach begins, however, not with specific techniques but rather a humble heart and an open mind. The cultivation of such relational attitudes, intellectual practices, and spiritual dispositions is more important than programmatic procedures. If development agencies do not begin with the recognition of the value of the marginalized and their agency, then any program put into place, no matter how well-designed, is likely to reinforce rather than mitigate systems of marginalization.

In seeking to learn from the perspectives of the poor and appreciate their agency, development agencies would also do well to keep in mind the intersectional and contextual nature of marginality. While much development has traditionally focused on economic poverty, other dimensions of privilege both yield advantages which the poor use in their work of survival and at the same time create an additional range of questions of justice that must be taken into consideration. If a project to alleviate poverty (and thus decrease the marginalization of the poor) increases the marginalization of women within that context, how much has been gained? In this regard, recent trends towards a broad variety of social development goals reflect a more comprehensive understanding.

Development agencies must thus take into consideration a range of outcomes beyond merely overall level of economic development. Again, development agencies must listen to the marginalized in the contexts in which they work to identify and weigh these range of outcomes, rather than merely imposing judgments of such outcomes from outside.

Reading *The Arusha Call to Discipleship* through the Lens of MfM

Having more clearly laid out a theology of mission from the margins and its implications, we can return the focus to the work of the WCC itself, to *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*.

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The Arusha Call begins with an emphasis on a celebration of “life-giving movements of the Spirit.” This is a very positive approach and significant starting point if read through the perspective of the margins to bring out the transformative aspect of the Spirit. The Arusha theme is essentially related to a theology of life that comes from a God of life.

The question of justice is repeatedly raised in the Arusha Call, which concludes with a prayer that we will become “pilgrims of justice and peace in our time,” reflecting the theme of the WCC Busan Assembly of 2013. However, the perspective of mission from the margins is that we need now to go further in embracing justice as a thematic focus for our understanding of mission today. If voices from the margins are truly heard, we expect that this focus will strengthen in the upcoming conferences and assemblies. The opposite of poverty or other forms of marginalization is not wealth or power but justice.

Perhaps the most important remark in the document is the call to bring “inspiration from African contexts and spiritualities.” But this aspect was not much developed in the Arusha Call. Arusha could have drawn on the work of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), established in 1976 at a meeting in Dar es Salaam. That was a very important, life-giving movement that came from theologians who worked in “third world” contexts at that time. This movement has influenced theologians in the global north as well. Many people who have served in WCC circles have been influenced by the missiology of EATWOT.

Also missing here is a theology of incarnation. Incarnation is an important aspect, especially when it comes to the mission from the margins. How has God moved into the neighbourhood of the uttermost margins in the world? A theology of incarnation is the basis of incarnational missiology. In that incarnational mission praxis, cross and resurrection become a dialectical in daily and existential mission experience.

7.

INTRODUCTION TO “THE GIFT OF BEING: CALLED TO BE A CHURCH OF ALL AND FOR ALL”

When EDAN prepared its first document, *A Church of All and for All*, it took the lead in the struggle against oppression and segregation of persons with impairments in their respective churches and societies. With the publication of that document in 2003, which argued for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their respective churches and societies, the WCC recognized the importance of EDAN’s work in this respect.

In the years since then, EDAN has learned that *A Church of All and for All* has been useful to many of WCC’s member churches and that theological seminaries have used it widely in their teaching. Persons with impairments have grown in their capacity as agents of change, also within the ecumenical community. EDAN’s position has changed in this respect. We are no longer demanding recognition from the margins of WCC. Even though the struggle to be included and accepted in their church communities continues for many persons living with impairment and their families, there are promising signs that inclusion and participation by all is more positively affirmed as part of God’s gift. This means that where the previous document aimed at theological arguments in support of inclusion, the present document expresses the view that inclusion does not need an argument. Rather, from the perspective of the church, it is exclusion that requires an argument. Our Creator made all human beings after God’s image and likeness—not only *some* human beings but *all* human beings.

Speaking of the burden of proof that has shifted, however, has enabled us to turn the issue of inclusive language upside down. The present document uses first-person language in inclusive ways to invite all Christian churches to join us in listening to and reflecting upon the experience of members with impairments in their midst. Since we have all been created as finite beings, we all live with limitations of various kinds.

This study paper is addressed to the ecumenical family of churches and their communities as a testimony of the importance of speaking with our own voice as persons with disabilities within the church. It sends the message that it is no longer valid for Christians to speak about persons with disabilities as if we weren’t already present in the church to speak up for ourselves.

The study paper addresses the core themes on *valuing our human diversity*, as we believe that human diversity is constituted by living with gifts and talents as well as with limitations. While limitations—such as physical or cognitive impairments—sometimes affect the enjoyment of our gifts and talents, they also sometimes stimulate developing them. Looking at God’s *creation as an act of love* reminds us that when God looked upon creation, God saw that it was good because God created it out of love. The *gift of life* calls us to focus on the person rather than their impairing condition because this enables us to recognize that all human beings have gifts and talents that allow them to respond to their circumstances. Looking at impairment along these lines, we will discover that every human being is gifted in a way that others may need because we are gifts to one another. The theme of *vulnerability, limitation, and healing* brings to the church the understanding that vulnerability and dependency are key tenets of understanding human beings. We discuss here the notion of body capital, represented by a body that is forever young and strong—whereby in the economy of exchange, persons with disabilities whose bodies have limitations lose out because their body capital is deficient. The paper expounds a recurring sub-theme in religious thinking about disability on the question of healing, asking the following: If persons with disabilities are a gift to the body of Christ, then how can healing be an issue? What are we to make of the fact that many of these persons themselves witness that they neither want nor need to be cured of their impairment?

In the theme on *called to be a church of all and for all*, the paper explores the good news of the gospel that Jesus restores us as God’s creatures to communion with God, arguing that the reasons people may have had for excluding others from this relationship, inside or outside the church, have become obsolete. The gospel challenges the faithful not to drive out from their communities all those whom God already has accepted. True support will be based on the affirmation of the life of each person as a child of God, with or without disability. True support for persons with disabilities, then, does not focus on their needs, but invites the contribution of all that enables the church to be the body of Christ. That is how the needs of all God’s creatures are served.

We hope that this paper will once again inform communities of faith, their leaders, students in theology, and their teachers and inspire them to continue the work of becoming inclusive church communities. Much remains to be done in this respect. Our greatest hope is to be part of a church whose

communities know how to receive the gift of being the body of Christ and how to celebrate the rich variety in the giftedness of all of its members without the unholy consequences of maintaining segregating distinctions in how we shape our practices and institutions. As we all know, our churches still have a long way to go before they can truly claim to be a church of all and for all.

Anjeline Okola-Charles
Programme Executive
EDAN

**DOCUMENT OF EDAN: "THE GIFT OF BEING:
CALLED TO BE A CHURCH OF ALL AND FOR ALL"
(Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network)**

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INTRODUCTION

1. In 2003 the World Council of Churches (WCC) published the document *A Church of All and for All* prepared by EDAN (Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network), which argued for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their respective churches and societies. With the publication of this document, WCC aligned itself with a broader global development toward a human rights approach to disability that had already been underway for some time.

2. Change is indicated in particular by the paradigm shift that appears in WHO and UN documents such as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), and the Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). Known as the “social model” of disability, the changing views are reflected in the distinction between “impairment” and “disability.” This distinction marks the difference between impairing physical and mental conditions on the one hand, and the social and cultural responses to these conditions on the other.

3. Historically, “disability” has often been regarded from a negative perspective. Persons with impairments were ridiculed and bullied, and even without such degrading responses they were treated as incapable of living a fully human life. Overall they were excluded from interacting with other people on equal terms, even in their churches.

4. In this respect, things are beginning to change also in the context of Christian communities. The notion that disability is a punishment for a person’s sins no longer finds support in theological texts and ecclesial documents. This is not to say that such notions have lost their grip on people’s minds. The belief that disability marks a lack of faith that prevents God from performing a healing miracle is still alive. The same is true of the belief that disability is a sign of being possessed by demons that calls for exorcism.

5. By contrast, the notion of persons with impairments as human beings equal in worth and dignity is now firmly entrenched in official documents such as ICF and CRPD, which in many parts of the world are used as leverage for inclusive policies and practices in both church and society. These developments change the perception of persons with impairments from being the objects of pity to being respected as citizens in their capacity as bearers of human rights.

7. “*The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and for All*”

6. Christian communities participate in this global shift toward a human rights approach. At the same time, their theological reflection on what it means to be church, on its nature and mission in the world, leads to new understandings of disability. Religious understandings of disability in terms of divine punishment or demonic activity are abandoned. Churches are learning to see that persons with impairments have much to give to their communities, and are to be recognized as part of the life and the witness of the church.

7. Seeing the beginnings of change, EDAN started a process of reviewing its first document, which led it to conclude that while many of its observations and assumptions remain valid, the signs of change open up new perspectives. In many ways, persons with impairments and their families are still marginalized, but the burden of proof has shifted.

8. This means that where the previous document aimed at theological arguments in support of inclusion, the present document expresses the view that inclusion does not need an argument. Our Creator made *all* human beings after God’s image and likeness, not only some human beings. From the perspective of the church it is *exclusion*, not *inclusion*, that requires an argument.

9. Opening up a new perspective has implications for the use of inclusive language. The document *A Church of All and for All* used first-person-plural language – “we,” “us,” “our” – primarily to refer to EDAN’s members as self-advocates. We wanted that document to be recognized as testimony of the importance of speaking with our own voice. It sent the message that it should no longer be valid for Christians to speak *about* persons with disabilities as if we weren’t already present in the church to speak up for ourselves. At the time, it was important to underline that as members of EDAN we had become the agents of change.

10. Speaking of the burden of proof that has shifted, however, has enabled us to turn the issue of inclusive language upside down. The present document uses first-person language in inclusive ways to invite all Christian churches to join us in listening to and reflecting upon the experience of members with impairments in their midst. Since we have all been created as finite beings, we all live with limitations of various kinds.

11. With this new document, EDAN hopes to assist the ecumenical family in learning to see the unholy consequences of maintaining segregating distinctions in the way that we shape our practices and institutions. As we all know, our churches still have a long way to go before they can truly claim to be a church of all and for all.

I. VALUING HUMAN DIVERSITY

Being Created in the Image of God

12. We acknowledge that some theological viewpoints interpret human createdness in ways that are not favourable to persons with impairments, particularly cognitive impairments. Looking for ‘the seat’ of the image, some theologians asked wherein, the divine the image was to be found. The notion of being created in the image of God in terms of the human intellect came with considerable costs. It implied that human beings with profound intellectual and developmental impairments were not recognisable as truly human.

13. As life expectancy is increasing in many parts of the world, our churches and societies find themselves increasingly challenged by growing numbers of persons in advanced stages of dementia. Decline of their “powers of the rational soul” puts these persons at risk of being regarded as people for whom the notion of being created in God’s image has lost its meaning. In many ways, this notion appears to be appropriated by the temporarily abled-bodied.

14. Looking at the biblical evidence in both the Old and the New Testament, attempts to identify where the image is “seated” remain highly speculative. Following the New Testament, there is a clear view of whom the notion of the divine image applies. For Paul, only Christ is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15). It is only through him that sinful human beings are restored in their relationship with God the Father, because “they are now justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-24).

15. Thinking about the image along Pauline lines, we discover that the question is not *where* but *how* the image is found, which in the letter to the Colossians is answered by referring us to God’s saving grace. “He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col.

1:13-14). If Christ is the true image of God, then what is imaged in each of us is the fact of being constituted, and then restored, in the relationship with our maker.

16. Thus understood, the image is not an intrinsic quality of human beings, but is a quality of the relationship that is inaugurated by God’s act of creation. It transcends the meaning of all other facts about our actual existence as the particular human beings that we are. God’s relationship with human beings is grounded in the act of creation. As we all are created in God’s image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27), there is no difference in view of the relationship that God the Creator maintains with each of us.

17. This biblical view warrants the unity of humankind. It allows for the celebration of the widest possible diversity among human beings because in the eyes of God there are no human beings of a lesser kind. Differences between God’s creatures have no distinctive significance in the eyes of God, including the differences between kinds of abilities and disabilities. All human beings are created equal in view of God’s loving kindness, no matter what differences their bodies and minds may exhibit.

The Value of Life

18. With regard to the value of life, it is decisive for Christians that human life is created as part of the economy of grace. Life is not valuable because it enables the pursuit of happiness, or freedom, or even virtue. That is to say, the value of life is not dependent on particular goals that it enables us to pursue. In this connection, the notion of “quality of life” (to which we will return more extensively later in this document – see §§58 ff) has been presented as criterion to determine which lives are “truly” human. From a Christian perspective, however, human life derives its value from the fact that it is God’s gift.

19. From the perspective of the gospel, therefore, there are no human beings whose lives are of lesser value, because God’s purpose for earthly creatures does not depend on their capacities and abilities. The gospel proclaims that Christ fulfils God’s purpose for his creatures. In Jesus’ own words: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Whatever incapacities and inabilities we may have, they will never eliminate the relationship that our Creator maintains with us. Being the fountain of all that is good, God does not abandon the work that his hand began.

20. The theological reason for affirming the value of life, then, lies in its creatureliness. The Christian faith affirms the value of life independently of its state or condition. It does not distinguish between human lives that do and human lives that don't measure up against a prevailing account of "quality." God created human beings in his image; he did not create only some human beings in his image. Nor did God divide humanity in distinct categories. In God there is diversity, but no division.

21. We conclude that grounding the value of life in an account of the quality of human lives is invalid, theologically speaking. Regardless of the state or condition of our bodies and minds, we live in the economy of grace. God does not abandon human beings when their human faculties are diminished, not even when they appear virtually extinct. As God's creatures, we will always be valuable in the eyes of our maker.

The Language of "Disability"

22. Human diversity is constituted by, among other things, both talents and limitations. These conditions are part of how we are created. Recognizing limitation as part of creation has important implications for how we speak about "disability" in the church. It means we cannot speak indiscriminately about "the disabled" as if the individuals identified by this label are all alike in this one respect.

23. When persons with different impairments are lumped together as "the disabled," as if they were a homogeneous group, we disrespect differences. Even when we lump together persons with the same impairment as a homogeneous group, we disrespect individual differences. Persons with impairments differ from one another as much as people in any other segment of society differ from one another.

24. It is important to expose the political nature of disability discourse. This discourse shapes a category of people whom society considers to be in need of help because of a particular condition. Speaking indiscriminately about "the disabled" is a strategy that society uses to control its fear of facing the limitations that living with impairments entails. People being labelled as "disabled" are set apart from mainstream society as people with "special needs." To "take care" of their special needs, they are referred to all kinds of "special" arrangements, such as special institutions, hospitals, and schools. This strategy has marked the lives of persons with impairments at least since the late nineteenth century.

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25. As a result, these persons have one experience in common that most other people are not familiar with, which is the experience of being set apart from other people. In this way their existence has been marginalized because of their impairments. This is the one condition that changes “impairment” into “disability.” Unsurprisingly, persons with impairments of various kinds have organized themselves in many countries into powerful advocacy groups that work together for the equal rights of all.

26. Criticizing the language that lumps them together as “the disabled,” disability advocates have coined their slogan, “Nothing about us without us,” claiming the right to tell their own stories rather than being told by others what their disability “means.” Telling one’s own story is the appropriate way for a person to account for what they are capable of doing, rather than having others identify them through what they cannot do. In this connection, it is often said that dividing human beings into distinct categories fails to recognize their personhood, as well as their individual identities. It fails to recognize the fact that they, no less than other persons, are the “authors” of their own lives.

27. There are two sides to this. From the perspective of the church, the notion of human persons being the authors of their own lives appears at best to be only partially true. From a theological perspective, the question “Who am I?” cannot be separated from the question “Whose am I?” Knowing that God creates all human beings, Christians believe that human beings do not possess the authorship of their own lives.

28. But there is another side to this as well. When the question “Who am I?” cannot be separated from the question “Whose am I?”, theologically speaking, this also implies that other people cannot speak definitive words about our lives. This is very important for persons with impairments. Where others frequently present the view of disability as a tragedy, it is crucial that each and every one has the right to tell the story of their journey in life from their own perspective.

29. Herein lays the partial truth, then, of the claim that we are the authors of our own lives. It marks the authority to speak in our own voice over against other people who are imposing their views upon us. It is important to oppose generalizing and degrading language in how we think and speak about the meaning of impaired or limited conditions of human existence. In determining what such conditions mean, we can only say that they mean

many different things to many different people. In this respect, the task in life is the same for everyone, which is to find our ways in view of our possibilities and limitations.

Supporting People

30. Sometimes human limitation – such as caused by physical or cognitive impairments – affects our enjoyment of our talents, sometimes it stimulates the development of them. Whatever the case may be, there is ample reason for recognizing individual support needs, particularly within church communities. The way supports are shaped to address categorical needs, however, has often lead to segregation. Many instances of ignorance, neglect, and abuse have been part of this history, which is not to deny that many instances of positive dedication and commitment can also be found in places of segregation.

31. At the same time, we recognize that while the principle of segregation of persons with impairments should always be questioned, segregated settings may have different functions in different societies, depending upon their socio-economic and cultural circumstances. In any circumstances, though, churches cannot evade the question of appropriate supports. There must always be ample room for church members with impairments to come forward and tell their own stories. This is the least we can expect from Christian communities: that they create space for each and every one of their members.

32. As Paul's image of the members of the church (1 Cor. 12) has taught us: within the sacramental unity of the body of Christ, no one can say, "I have no need of you." As there are no members of this body without gifts, there is also no one who is not in need of others.

33. In the context of socio-economic policy, however, things are oftentimes less clear. The level of support that different people need varies significantly. As a result, the question of how they are best served depends upon the context. Socio-economic and cultural differences can lead to different assessments of what society should provide. As far as the church is concerned, however, there can be little doubt about its vocation, which is to be a community *with* its members with impairment, acknowledging the gift that each member has to contribute.

II. CREATION AS AN ACT OF LOVE

Being God's Creatures

34. When God looked upon creation, God saw that it was good, an affirmation that is repeated throughout the creation story in the book of Genesis. Therefore, it is befitting to start our reflections on disability with the same affirmation. Creation is an expression of God's love. The goodness of being God's creature lies in the relationship with each of us that is inaugurated by the triune God. Herein lies the foundation for the unity of humankind. It exists in the fact that we are all God's creatures. In reflecting on disability, this affirmation lays the ground for anything else that can be said.

35. The Christian tradition confesses that creation is a wilful act of love. God calls each and every one of us into being. The purpose of our being is to respond to the loving relationship that God offers to each of us, which is best expressed in the biblical notion of communion.

36. Affirming that being created is an expression of God's love means that in the eyes of a loving God there are no categories of human beings divided according to status, race, gender, age, or ability. There are only human beings who are God's children. To be God's creature, then, entails being offered the loving kindness of our maker. This is the gift of being. It is offered to anyone, whether black or white, male or female, young or old, with or without impairment. The first act toward each of God's creatures is this gift.

37. As it was recognized in *A Church of All and for All*, a powerful image in this connection is Paul's message to the Ephesians that Christ has come to tear down the walls (Eph. 2:14). Divisions between "us" and "them" are the mark that such walls continue to exist. Although persons living with impairments are less and less kept behind walls in segregated places, the walls of fear and prejudice remain, even within the church.

38. Particularly in the church, other people's stares are often more painful than inaccessible stairs. Looking at others as though they are not part of "us" conflicts with the fact that God has called them to be faithful children as well. It also contradicts Christ's ministry of restoring all of us in God's communion. Therefore the community of the church is called upon especially to tear down walls of prejudice and fear that maintain the division between "us" and "them."

39. As a document addressing the family of ecumenical churches, the present document seeks to be in dialogue with the WCC's *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, with its emphasis on the notion of communion as a central image.¹

As a divinely established communion, the Church belongs to God and does not exist for itself. It is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom. (§13)

40. Viewing limitation as part of the world that God created, the church has every reason not to exempt living with these conditions from its mission. This conviction was already expressed in *A Church of All and for All* in the words, "The Church is by definition a place and a process of communion, open to all and inviting all people without discrimination. It is a place of hospitality and of welcome" (§85). This inclusive understanding of the church's nature and mission points to the main thrust of the present document.

41. The affirmation of limitation as part of the world that God created does not deny that the experience of limitation shares in the ambiguity that is part of our existence. But it is to deny that it is peculiar to the existence of only *some* human beings. As Paul puts it: "The whole of creation is groaning in labour" (Rom. 8:23). To be human is to live a life that is marked by the brokenness that is part of our limited existence. Like all human beings, persons with impairments experience both sides of life: the sorrow, loss, and grief as well as the joy, the happiness, and the blessings. In the eyes of a loving God, the categorical distinction between human beings with and those without impairments is irrelevant.

42. Our aim in this respect is to assist the ecumenical family in learning to see the unholy consequences of maintaining this distinction in how we shape our practices and institutions. As we all know, our churches still have a long way to go, notwithstanding some inspiring initiatives. Much remains to be done with respect to working toward a church of all and for all.

Community and Communion

43. All things are created in Christ, and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:16). This confession provides the context for determining what it

¹ *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and order Paper, 214 (Geneva: WCC, 2013).

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means to say that the church is called to be a community of all and for all. As it is stated in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*: “Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing” (§1).

44. This gift of communion is anticipated when the church confesses that we are created *in Christ*. Being thus created does not only imply that God wants us to be for the purpose of responding to his love; it also implies that God fulfils this purpose through Christ’s work, as the church confesses it. This is the heart of the gospel on which the church is grounded.

45. Having been offered the gift of being, we are asked to respond to God’s invitation, which is “to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27). Our journey in life is to seek to live in responsible obedience toward this purpose. Often it is a journey with conflicting tasks arising from the fact that we are finite beings: the tasks of both accepting and resisting; the tasks of both learning and teaching; the tasks of both reconciling and struggling. We know that community of human beings is often disrupted amidst these ambiguities, which frequently results in the exclusion of particular people.

46. The church knows that God persists in faithfulness despite human disobedience. When human beings disrupt community, God calls upon the church to restore it by offering the church the gift of the Holy Spirit. We appreciate that the church, in finding its way in restoring community, has learned that much is to be gained by listening to marginalized voices in its midst. This wisdom also pertains to the voice of persons with impairments in their respective church communities.

47. Once churches learn to listen to this voice, they will discover the many gifts these persons have to offer, some of which have emerged from the experience of living with impairment. They include talents and skills developed through education and training, in various academic disciplines, business, as well as the arts. Other gifts are also offered, for example, of persons with profound intellectual or developmental impairments who bring the gift of attachment and presence to those who provide care and support. As disability advocates, we hold the presence of these persons in particular to be a gift that is crucial to the life and communion of the church.

The Body of Christ

48. God's gifts to the church include each and every one of its members, then, even though some of its members may appear to be insignificant in the eyes of others. We already referred to the meditation on the church as the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. As a body, the church is made up of many members, all of whom bring different contributions to the whole. Some parts are perceived to be stronger; others are perceived to be weaker.

49. In Paul's language, the body has parts of which those who consider themselves to be superior are ashamed; parts they rather would cover up (1 Cor. 12:23). God has so arranged the body of Christ, however, that precisely these parts become indispensable. Therefore, they are to be especially honoured and respected, and their essential contribution is to be acknowledged (12:24).

50. Given that God has thus arranged the body of Christ, it is very important to understand that 1 Corinthians is not sketching a moral vision or some kind of ideal for the church. As *The Church – Towards a Common Vision* states: "Christians believe and confess with the Creed that there is an indissoluble link between the work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and the reality of the Church" (§3). Proclaiming the church as the body of Christ is not a moral vision, therefore, but a confession of what we have received.

51. This all-inclusive understanding of the Body of Christ as the reality of God's gift rooted in the communion of its members with God impels Christians to stand with the downtrodden and the outcasts.

The world that "God so loved" is scarred with problems and tragedies which cry out for the compassionate engagement of Christians. The source of their passion for the transformation of the world lies in their communion with God in Jesus Christ. They believe that God, who is absolute love, mercy and justice, can work through them, in the power of the Holy Spirit. (*TCTCV*, §64)

Consequently, as disciples of Jesus Christ, Christians cannot but challenge political authorities when their decrees show little respect for human dignity.

52. In view of this calling, Christians confess their shortcomings and failures and pray for the forgiveness that the gospel promises. This confession includes acknowledging that we oftentimes fail to grasp what it means to be

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a forgiven people. It also means acknowledging that in church communities we continue to erect or maintain walls and barriers to exclude other members from the body of Christ.

53. However, since we are a forgiven people, there is no need for walls of separation, because there are no differences between human beings that we need to be afraid of. In order to learn the skills of a forgiven people and gratefully receive the gift of human diversity, we need God’s communion as the sacramental gift of the Holy Trinity.

54. This sacramental gift is the body of Christ that has been broken for us all. In the liturgy of the Eucharist we are invited to lift our hearts to the Lord and give him praise. If we have failed so far to be inclusive communities of the body of Christ, the Eucharist as the sacrament of communion will remind us of what we have received. “So then, brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another” (1 Cor. 11:33). Moreover, in order to offer our gifts to God, we are requested first to reconcile with our brothers and sisters: “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-26). How then can we offer our praise, prayer, and gifts to God if we remain in conflict with our brothers and sisters, discriminating against them, isolating or mistreating them?

55. Accordingly, Christians are called to overcome all kinds of divisions in the Eucharist. As the WCC stated in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*: “Christians are called in the Eucharist to be in solidarity with the outcast and to become signs of the love of Christ who lived and sacrificed himself for all and now gives himself in the Eucharist.” This is the offer of God’s communion by virtue of which the church lives.

56. Without the incorporation of all God-given members, the church does not reflect the body of Christ. When Christians deprive others of gifts that God intended to be part of creation, they fall short of the glory of God. The recognition of those who are experienced in living with impairments ensures that the church will be faithful to its calling. Working to overcome every form of exclusion and discrimination among God’s people is a part of the unity that the church seeks, and that Jesus prays for, so that the world may believe (John 17:21).

III. THE GIFT OF LIFE

Giftedness

57. The affirmation of our createdness as an expression of God's love extends itself in the notion of giftedness. Christians confess that life comes from God and that God intended it for us as a gift. In the present connection, "gift language" can be a very powerful expression, but it is not without its problems. Is the impairing condition that one is born with a gift? Some persons living with impairment say it is; others say it isn't.

58. Affirming the giftedness of impairment is often done through the notion of personal identity: "My blindness is not a condition that I have. I am a blind person, and that's who I am." Something similar can be said with regard to conditions such as Down syndrome. One cannot separate the person from the syndrome, because without it, that person would cease to exist as who they are: they would lose their identity.

59. Others disagree, however: "Even when I have fully accepted that my cerebral palsy is part of me, it doesn't mean I see it as a gift. Certain things that are important to me remain quite difficult because of my impairment, such as adequate speech."

60. Perhaps an attempt to broaden the question can be helpful here. The language of "gift" in this connection does not necessarily refer to a *particular* condition. A broader perspective would encourage us to recognize that the gift is (in) the person with the impairment rather than in the impairment itself. Persons with impairments are much more than their impairment, whether it is Down syndrome, blindness, cerebral palsy, or any other.

61. Focusing on the person rather than its impairing condition enables us to recognize that all human beings have gifts and talents that allow them to respond to their circumstances, whatever their particular condition may be. Looking at impairment along these lines we will discover that every human being is gifted in a way that others may need. This recognition in turn highlights the communal aspect of gift language. We are gifts to one another.

62. Gift language can be taken in a yet wider sense, however. It may not regard a particular condition, or even the person with that condition, but *life itself*. Taken in this sense, the gift of life refers to the condition of "being alive." It is important to realize, however, that this condition never comes

in isolation. The gift of life includes family: a place where we feel at home and people whose acceptance means that we belong with them. But it also comes with ambiguities, limitations, and sorrows.

63. For some persons their potential barely exceeds the condition of being alive, as in the case of profound intellectual and developmental impairments. Even in these cases, there may be gifts that others are in need of, for example the gift of one's presence, or of one's capacity to respond to attention or to exhibit some sign of attachment, or to have one's body respond peacefully to the care received from other people.

Socio-economic Deprivation

64. In recent history the segregation of persons with impairments from the rest of society has been governed by, among other things, the perception that they are unable to be productive members. Until the present day, disability rights are perceived within the purview of economic conditions.

65. In view of policies that marginalize persons with impairment for economic reasons, however, Christians know, or should know, that the economy of production is transcended by the economy of God's grace. In the divine economy, people's gifts and talents are not measured according to economic productivity, but according to their role in the realization of God's purpose in creation. As stated in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*:

The Church is comprised of all socio-economic classes: both rich and poor are in need of the salvation that only God can provide. After the example of Jesus, the Church is called and empowered in a special way to share the lot of those who suffer and to care for the needy and the marginalized. (§66)

66. Human lives always have these two components then: first, the potential of the individual human being, and second, the circumstances in which it needs to be developed. While these two components can be distinguished, they cannot be separated. They are often intertwined and interdependent. Children who are malnourished have a greater risk of physical and mental impairments due to their family's poverty, in which case their damaged brain is the result of a social condition. In this way cognitive impairments in many children are causally linked to social rather than natural conditions. As Christians we need to ask ourselves to what extent we are responsible for upholding these repugnant social conditions.

67. In the same connection, living in urban societies rather than in rural areas comes with different hazards. It makes us collectively responsible for injuries to innocent children sustained through such things as landmines, substance abuse, or HIV infection. In general there is a collective social responsibility for the injuries of children born in conditions of deprivation. In all parts of the world church communities try to find ways to share in bearing this responsibility.

68. When people are suffering from socio-economic deprivation, the meaning of gift language comes under pressure. Gifts are typically appreciated for the particular experience they promise. But what is the gift of life when a person is born under negative social and economic conditions? What if a person is born into extreme poverty, in the midst of genocide, or to drug-addicted parents? Living in such conditions cannot but raise the question of what the gift of life *is for*?

69. Answering truthfully we must say that the gift of life does not save human beings from the experience of brokenness. Nor does it shield against injustices. Family, neighbourhood, community, nation, state, and society at large—each in turn can fail to provide what is necessary for a decent human life. But seeing human life as God's gift does shield against indifference and prejudice. The gift of being materializes when God's creatures accept their responsibility in supporting others to develop their gifts and talents.

70. In view of these responsibilities, we need to acknowledge that most persons with impairments are economically disenfranchised and experience some level of deprivation in their standard of living or employment opportunities. When social support is unavailable, their families have to make considerable sacrifices. Bearing responsibility for a person with impairment takes its toll in terms of time and resources, and will limit their parents' and siblings' opportunities to earn an income.

71. Poverty and lack of opportunity are the realities of the overwhelming majority of persons with impairments and their families today. The ramifications of this fact cannot be properly considered, however, in isolation from the effects of economic disparity between societies.

72. The disparity between the well-being of a person with impairment in the economic North and that of a non-impaired person in the economic South, for example, is such that on average the former may be "better off"

than the latter. At the same time, persons with impairment in the economic North experience a huge gap in well-being compared to the average member of their own society.

Medical Technology

73. Issues of social justice also pertain to other aspects of personal well-being. Persons with impairments may face many barriers to appropriate health and medical care, particularly in areas of disaster and violence. Much the same is true for the accessibility of education. Bereft of the opportunity to be trained in an occupation, people find that their gifts and talents go to waste. Here we can make the same point about the relative deprivation of persons with impairment in their own societies. Equal opportunities are mostly wanting.

74. A particular concern with regard to justice is the rapid global development of medical technology in the areas of artificial reproduction. Combined with genetic screening and testing, artificial reproduction gives prospective parents the option of “informed choice” about specific genetic characteristics of their offspring.

75. In the bioethical literature that deals with the moral issues attached to this development, the justification of screening and testing frequently focuses on what are called “genetic defects” and argues in favour of these practices based on the notion of “quality of life.” Quality of life arguments are troublesome, however, when they are produced to support the claim that some impairing conditions result in human lives that are not worth living.

76. Some bioethicists in the Western world make this case on the basis of the distinction between “being alive” and “having a life.” While being alive is a condition that holds for all living creatures, having a life is a condition that only holds for human beings. The latter is distinguished by the faculties of reason and will, which enable the bearers of these faculties to set goals, make plans, reason about them, change them, pursue them, and so on.

77. Based on this distinction it is argued that the value of life for human beings is dependent on the condition of “having a life” because it constitutes human beings as individual selves. What makes human life valuable is the capacity to pursue one’s own goals as the expression of what one values in life. The value of life, in other words, depends on the capacity of valuing one’s life.

78. The implication of this argument is that the condition of “being alive” has no value in itself. Life is valuable for human beings because of what they are capable of doing with it. Therefore, following these bioethicists, the notion of the “sanctity of life” must be abandoned because it is taken to stake the value of life on the condition of “being alive.”

79. Christian views opposing this bioethical position sometimes do take the notion of the “sanctity of life” to mean that life as such is sacred. However, this view tends to overlook the distinction between the creature and its creator. The value of human life is derivative. It is grounded in the fact that it is God’s gift to humankind. In this sense, the doctrine of sanctity of life retains its significance in Christian theology.

80. The church confesses that all things are created in Christ, and that in him all things hold together (Col. 1:16). The purpose of our lives, then, is in God’s act. Therefore, the faith of the church proclaims the goodness of “being.” Focusing on human life as God’s gift in creation, the present document questions the bioethical position that grounds the value of life in the qualities of our bodies and minds. Instead, we take the position that the quality of our human lives is extrinsically grounded in the love of God. Without proclaiming the goodness of being, our faith loses the ground on which the language of hope can only begin to make sense.

81. Meanwhile, the effect of trading the notion of “quality of life” for the notion of “sanctity of life” should not be underestimated. The bioethical argument referred to above is produced in the cultural context of a free market economy, which allows for the “production” of “designer babies.” In this context, abortion rates can be staggeringly high, as is presently the case for unborn children diagnosed with Down syndrome.

82. These developments in artificial reproduction cannot but send the message that “disabled lives” are unwelcome and ought to be prevented from coming into being. Defending these developments as a matter of “reproductive freedom” tends to ignore the effects of that message for persons with impairments and their families.

83. In view of these developments, the church must take upon itself the role of advocacy for the social position of impaired human beings and their future in society. Human reproduction is invaded by the commodification of “preferred” children in a market economy, which in fact introduces a trend

toward “eugenics from below.” In view of the apparent rejection of genetics as a possible source of division and conflict, we call upon the WCC to take responsibility on this issue, reminding what was stated in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*:

The Church proclaims the words of hope and comfort of the Gospel, engages in work of compassion and mercy (cf. Luke 4:18-19) and is commissioned to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to serve God in the ministry of reconciling those divided by hatred or estrangement (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-21). (§66)

IV. VULNERABILITY, LIMITATION, AND HEALING

Accepting the Human Condition

84. The trend in reproductive technology betrays the apparent inability in contemporary society to face vulnerability, limitation, and loss as an in-eradicable part of human existence. This explains the fear of living with a disability. In the public eye, persons living with impairment betoken vulnerability, which society seeks to compensate by accounting for these persons as people with “special need.”

85. Inadvertently, the institutional arrangements based on the perception of “special needs” tend to reinforce the widespread belief that vulnerability is a categorical distinction that applies to a particular group of people. It is not. Vulnerability is inherent to the human condition. Human beings as such are vulnerable. To ascribe vulnerability to persons with impairments serves the false belief that people without impairments are strong and self-sufficient.

86. The response from the disability rights movement to this false belief has been that “ability” is not a permanent condition for anyone. There are only “temporarily able-bodied” human beings. Most of us, if not all, will face impairment at some point in our lives. This is why it is in everybody’s interest, so the argument runs, to include persons with “disabilities” in society on the basis of equality. However, instead of justifying the goal of inclusion on the basis of enlightened self-interest, Christian theology has taught that “ability” cannot be a permanent condition of human beings because of the transience and finitude of all creatures.

Limitation

87. All this is not to say that “vulnerability” is a non-issue for persons living with impairment. People often seek to hide their vulnerability from them-

selves as well as from others. Wounds and bruises are painful, and there is no reason to deny this. There is certainly no point in romanticizing the wounds people carry. We did already refer to the groaning of all of creation in Romans 8 (see above §42). Human existence is characterized by the labour that comes with its being finite. The promise of a new creation has not yet been fulfilled. The “not yet” of this promise is exemplified by the fact that as human beings we still face hardships, fall ill, and die.

88. These reflections take us again to the question of limitation. We cannot speak about the “gift of being” without addressing the limitation of our being as God’s creatures. Equally, we cannot speak about it without recognizing the suffering and lament of all of humanity. This indicates why limitation is the ground of our need for each other and of our need for God. It does not merely affect certain individuals, but involves all of us together as the people of God in a broken world.

89. This is what the Bible means when it says that we all hold the treasure of God’s life in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7). For the church it is crucially important to note that we hold it together. As it was said in *A Church of All and for All*:

In our attitudes and actions toward one another, at all times, the guiding principle must be the conviction that we are incomplete, we are less than whole, without the gifts and talents of all people. *We are not a full community without one another.* Responding to and fully including people with impairments is not an option for the churches of Christ. It is the church’s defining characteristic. (§87)

90. Acknowledging limitation that is part of our being as God’s creatures, then, implies accepting that contingency is part of our experience. We are subject to all hazardous eventualities that can befall finite beings. This is no less true of “temporarily able-bodied” people as it is true for people living with impairment.

91. At the same time it is true that persons living with impairment and their families often have a stronger sense of the experience of contingency than other people may have. They know what it is to have one’s life turned upside-down by the unexpected. As it was noted in *A Church of All and for All*:

We have found ourselves in that liminal space between what is known and what is yet unknown, able only to listen and wait. We have faced

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fear and death and know our own vulnerability. We have met God in that empty darkness, where we realised we were no longer “in control” and learned to rely on God’s presence and care. We have learned to accept graciously and to give graciously, to be appreciative of the present moment. We have learned to negotiate a new terrain, a new way of life that is unfamiliar. We have learned to be adaptable and innovative, to use our imaginations to solve new problems. (§54)

92. Knowing what it is to live with ambiguity in the midst of this paradox, many persons with impairments have learned to be resilient. But such accomplishment does not come easy. The confrontation with impairment can be very painful – not necessarily in a physical but in a psychological sense – particularly in its early stages. It frustrates people’s expectations, or the expectations of their families. Regardless of its particularities, impairment always means that some possibilities are irreversibly foreclosed.

93. In view of these experiences, we affirm that *every* person living with impairment may find peace in seeking God. In one way or another, all have wrestled with God intellectually and physically to achieve this peace, and whilst some have been privileged to write intellectually about it, others exhibit this peace in their innate gift of grace shown in the love and affection for those who support them. Persons without apparent intellectual powers may also find peace in God. If so, as we believe, the church surely can find ways of accepting the gift they have to offer. God loves each and every one and extends to all the opportunity to respond to that love.

94. In this connection, we are reminded of the story of Jacob wrestling with God (Gen. 32:24-26). In their wrestling with God, persons living with impairment ask the same questions: Why me? Is there a purpose to my condition? In view of these questions, having a “disability” is often considered to be tragic, even though many persons with impairments live reasonably happy lives, not unlike other people. However, it sometimes takes time to discover and acknowledge that impairment is not necessarily tragic.

95. Given varying cultural backgrounds, people come to accept their impairments by diverse routes. Some have had impairments since birth, either by congenital conditions or by a traumatic birth, whilst others have been victims of accidents, or have developed conditions later in life. Tragedies of lost hopes and expectations are overcome by learning to find a new self. This can be the result of a painful struggle, the outcome of which is unknown and feared at the time the impairing condition imposes itself. There-

fore, the experience of tragedy is real at realizing that the impairment is inevitable, because it is prior to discovering a way in which that experience can be overcome.

96. Churches must take seriously this experience and sustain people in their lament of being hurt by life's contingencies. The experience of grieving can be very real, which is especially true when people suffer from acquired impairments such as traumatic brain injury. In such cases, life as one knew it is gone, and what the future will bring is frighteningly uncertain. This may also be true for parents whose child develops a physical or intellectual impairment. Grieving loss takes time, which makes the presence of patient friends particularly important. Many people have reported being disappointed in their faith communities in this respect.

Vulnerability

97. The first thing to say in this regard is that in Jesus Christ, God has assumed the life of a human being. This is expressed by the notion of the incarnation. By taking upon himself the mission of living among his creatures and then dying for them, God in Jesus Christ embraces the vulnerability of human existence in order to redeem it. In sending his son because of his love for the world (John 3:16), God has accepted the limitations of being finite as inherent to human existence.

98. In the incarnation, we see how God's vulnerability is connected with love. When God accepts and heals us in our self-incurred afflictions, it is done through God's love, in which God becomes vulnerable to the possibility of being betrayed. Therefore, it is said that we are healed by God's bruises (Is. 53:5).

99. God is love (1 John 4:8). This means that God is exposing himself to vulnerability. There are many passages in the Bible, particularly in the books of Israel's prophets, where we hear about God grieving, or being infuriated in being rejected. "I will punish her for the festival days of the Baal, when she offered them incense, decked herself with jewellery and went after her lovers, and forgot me" (Hos. 2:13).

100. What pertains to the connection between God's love and God's vulnerability also pertains to human beings. Part of what it means to love is that we make ourselves vulnerable to the other. When we give ourselves in love, we do so because of the desire to be loved in return. Another person's

7. *“The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and for All”*

love cannot be commanded, however, which means that when in love we are always at risk of being ignored or rejected. Since to love is an act of freedom, there is no guaranteed loving response.

101. Vulnerability, then, is at the very heart of God’s world. This is testified in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians where he writes about his own impairment:

Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:8-10)

102. Living in a state of vulnerability, then, a person with impairment is not an exception to an otherwise untainted existence. “The power of Christ” that dwells in the apostle stems from acknowledging that the “thorn on the flesh” is part of his creatureliness. The same message is found in his hymn in Philippians, where he features Christ by saying that “though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil. 2:6-7).

103. When the power of Christ dwells in us, then, we will wilfully acknowledge that human life exposes us to the vulnerability that is inherent in our creatureliness. Consequently, the argument to include persons living with impairment and their families in our midst out of enlightened self-interest misses the point. God himself has embraced finite human existence with all of its frailness and limitations.

Charity

104. Traditionally, the most important of motive for serving people with special needs has been charity. They were looked after and taken care of as a way of practising charity. In this way, persons in need of support came to be regarded as “vehicles of charity.” They were seen as God’s gift that enabled members of the church to grow in the practice of Christian virtue. As has been widely testified in recent decades, being a vehicle of charity has not been a blessing for persons with impairments and their families. More often it has been degrading and humiliating.

105. Self-advocates tend to resent the notion of charity, also within the church. They want to be appreciated for what they have to contribute, rather than being welcomed as people in need who create opportunities for others to practice Christian virtue. Here again, the church has much to benefit from the image of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians.

106. Put in terms of Paul's metaphor: the eye does not welcome the contribution of the ear because it will improve the capacity for seeing, but because together with all the other members, they are the body of Christ that they are called to be. The church's vocation is to be the sign and servant of God's design to gather humanity and all of creation into communion under the lordship of Christ (see Eph. 1:10). The church will only be able to live this vocation when it learns to appreciate the gifts from all its members.

Healing

107. A recurring theme in religious thinking about disability is the question of healing. Given the continuing witness of persons with impairments as a gift to the body of Christ, how can healing be an issue? What are we to make of the fact that many of these persons themselves witness that they neither want nor need to be cured of their impairment?

108. In view of these questions many people are struggling with what are called "the healing narratives" in the New Testament. Not only do the gospels tell stories about Jesus' ministry of healing, they also indicate that this is very much a part of his mission. The question needs to be asked, however, whether this was also Jesus' understanding?

109. Next, there is the persistent popular view among religious people that connects disability with sin. When theological reflection has abandoned this connection, as is true for most of contemporary theology, does it follow that the healing narratives have nothing more to say? Are they indeed stories about healing as cure, as is oftentimes assumed, or are they about healing in a different respect? For example, are they stories of faith and healing as the restoration of communion with God in Christ as sign of the kingdom and the new life, where bodily limitations of time and space are transcended?

110. Furthermore, connecting disability with healing as cure also entails connecting it with a life full of suffering, which may be a presumptuous imposition. As we have seen, self-advocates have responded to this imposition with the slogan "Nothing about us without us" in order to claim the right to tell their own stories.

7. *“The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and for All”*

111. Many faithful persons with impairments have testified that the healing narratives and their interpretations have been a reason to turn away from the church. These stories have been used to treat people with disabilities and their families as objects of pity who need to be cured and forgiven. From what has been said in this document thus far, it is clear that regarding these persons as objects of pity because of their impairing condition is theologically unsound. All of us are human beings created in the image of God, and therefore we all, including persons living with impairment, exist within the economy of grace, which no condition of impairment can change.

112. Moreover, if, from the perspective of the gospel, cure was a necessary element of healing, we would have to conclude that Paul’s account of the body of Christ needing the gifts of *all* is in fact empty. In view of this consideration, the need for healing is better understood as pertaining to the restoration of the community with God. “Healing” refers to wounds that are incurred by the violence of excluding people by sending them away. In terms of Paul’s image, “healing” is needed when despised members have been cut off from the body of Christ.

113. As we have argued in the previous chapters, the church knows, or must know, that as a forgiven people it cannot exclude some as unwanted members. This pertains to all persons living with impairment, among whom persons living with cognitive impairment should be mentioned in particular. It is part of the mission of the church to welcome each and every one with, rather than in spite of, the impairing condition.

114. To illustrate the view we are presenting here, we will turn to the story of the man born blind. Jesus’ friends also apparently assume a link between disability and sin. However, when they ask the question, “Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?”, Jesus gives them no answer. Instead he says, “He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (John 9:2-3). Traditional readings have assumed that “God’s work” anticipates the fact that later in the story Jesus heals the blind man. As the narrative unfolds, however, something else is revealed.

115. The Pharisees accuse Jesus that in healing this man he failed to observe the Sabbath. They try to persuade the blind man to testify against Jesus, which the man refuses several times. He even dares to make fun of them: “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” (John 9:27). They get angry and throw him out of the temple.

116. When Jesus is informed about this, he goes out to find the man, and when he finds him, he asks, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man answers, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus then reveals himself, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he,” upon which the man responds, “Lord, I believe” (John 9:35-38).

117. So the man confesses to believe that Jesus is the son of man. Up to this point in the gospel of John, this confession has been the heart of the matter. The Pharisees have been emphatically opposing Jesus’ account of his mission. In their view, his “father” did not send him as he claims, because there is no communion with God other than by Moses’ law, which it is their duty to guard.

118. The conflict about Jesus’ mission shows how the man born blind reveals the work of God, namely by confessing that Jesus is from the Father. Since this is precisely what the Pharisees deny, Jesus tells them that despite their knowledge of the scriptures, they are spiritually blind: “If you were blind, you would not have sin, but now that you say ‘We see’ your sin remains” (John 9:41). In denying Jesus’ mission, they testify to have no true knowledge of God.

119. The central question with regard to the healing narratives then is: What is Jesus healing in people? We suggest the answer is that he heals their broken relationship with God. People who are “defiled” by impairment are thrown out of the temple and excluded from their religious community. Jesus restores them in these relationships. To be healed is to be restored in a relationship of communion with God and one another.

120. With regard to the healing narratives, then, we may look at religious and social rather than medical woundedness. No doubt people in these narratives perceived particular medical conditions as part of the impairment. But this does not alter the fact that the healing narratives are primarily concerned with the restoration of relationship, first with God and then with the community. This can be seen in the story about the man with leprosy who asks Jesus to make him clean (Mark 1:40-45), and in the story of the Jesus meeting the man who was paralyzed (Mark 2:1-12).

121. Healing narratives in the gospel provide a lens for rethinking “disability” as it has been understood traditionally in most religious communities, inside and outside Christianity. In reading them as reports about curative

medicine in biblical times, many communities have made "healing" a very painful and frustrating topic for persons living with impairment. It did not occur to readers that these "disabled" figures needed more to be healed of their estrangement from God and their fellow believers than of their impairment.

V. CALLED TO BE A CHURCH OF ALL AND FOR ALL

The Good News

122. The good news of the gospel is that the Jesus restores us as God's creatures to communion with God. Whatever reasons people may have had for excluding others from this relationship, inside or outside the church, have become obsolete. The gospel challenges the faithful not to drive out from their communities all those whom God already has accepted.

123. Jesus often describes the renewal of creation announced by gospel as a reversal of the ways of the world—for example, when he compared God's kingdom with a banquet for the poor. In making this comparison, he was perhaps remembering the passage in Isaiah where the prophet announces: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines" (Is. 25:6). In Matthew's account, the king's elite guests are too caught up in their affairs to honour his invitation. The king does not postpone the banquet. Instead, he invites people from the streets, who live on the margins. Jesus does not say that God's reign is for a future world. Instead, he says, "The kingdom of God is at hand." It is offered to us all as a present reality (see §73 of *A Church of All and for All*).

124. The document *Together towards Life* states:

The church is a gift of God to the world for its transformation toward the kingdom of God. Its mission is to bring new life and announce the loving presence of God in our world. We must participate in God's mission in unity, overcoming the divisions and tensions that exist among us, so that the world may believe and all may be one (John 17:21). The church, as the communion of Christ's disciples, must become an inclusive community and exists to bring healing and reconciliation to the world. How can the church renew herself to be missional and move forward together toward life in its fullness? (§10)

In view of this statement, we ask what hope this message entails for persons living with impairment and their families. What can we expect from the church when it is called to embody the kingdom of God?

125. When all who want to come are indeed invited to this feast – to this church – it will include people who at times feel they are looked upon as a disgrace to their community. Along with people who are poor, homeless, sick, in prison, or struggling with addictions, we will find persons with impairments. They are members of the body of Christ, but in our churches they are sometimes referred to as people who need to be prayed for.

Liturgy

126. As well-intended as such prayers are, they nonetheless send the message that the role of some is to pray for the good of others, while the role of these others is to be the beneficiaries of their prayers. This is not how we understand the presence of persons with impairments in our church communities. They are not merely the passive recipients of the prayers of other members. Instead, they hope for and expect a church community in which the category of “disability” no longer means anything. This expectation pertains to what the church preaches, to how it celebrates its liturgy, and to the ways it seeks to practise the gospel.

127. The most visible expression of church as communion is when it gathers in worship to give thanks for the paschal mystery. The Eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all God’s children. It commands the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic, and political life. It points beyond the communion of the church toward the whole of creation. As we read in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*,

All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ. Through the Eucharist the all-renewing grace of God penetrates and restores human personality and dignity . . . As participants in the Eucharist, therefore, we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this on-going restoration of the world’s situation and the human condition. (§20)

128. In celebrating communion with God and one another, the Eucharist opens up the vision of the renewal of creation, of which it is a foretaste. In the celebration of communion, the world is represented in that we give God thanks for signs of this renewal wherever human beings work for justice, love and peace (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, §22).

129. At this point it is especially relevant to focus on persons with cognitive impairment. They are left out of worship services as a matter of course, with the assumption, “They don’t understand what is happening, so why bother?”

This insensitive attitude toward these persons and their families is unholy. It ignores the fact that the experience and expression of the liturgy engages the whole person: not only their intellect, but also the senses: through music and singing, liturgical gestures such as kneeling and bowing, as well as art and the use of incense, each of which indicates the participation of the body in the liturgy. Persons with cognitive impairment are not oblivious to these expressions. They respond to the integrity of the liturgy in which they are invited to participate. They pick up the real and true involvement of those around them and respond to their devotion.

Mission

130. In its document *Together towards Life*, the WCC has stated that guided by the Holy Spirit, its mission aims at the liberation and reconciliation of the whole of creation:

The mission of the church is to prepare the banquet and to invite all people to the feast of life. The feast is a celebration of creation and fruitfulness overflowing from the love of God, the source of life in abundance. It is a sign of the liberation and reconciliation of the whole creation, which is the goal of mission. (§101)

We ask the church to invite persons living with impairment and their families to participate in this mission. True support will be based on the affirmation of the life of each person as a child of God, with or without impairment. True support for persons living with impairment, then, does not focus on their needs, but invites the contribution of all that enables the church to be the body of Christ. That is how the needs of all God's creatures are served.

131. This document professes the call for the church to be *a Church of all and for all*, where the contribution of persons living with impairment are valued, where they are respected for who they are, and find support in their communities. We ask the church to acknowledge and practise the equality and dignity of all human beings as the central task of living the gospel, and give witness of its message in all her work.

POSTSCRIPT

When the *Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network* (EDAN) prepared its first document *A Church of All and for All*, it took the lead in the struggle against oppression and segregation of persons with impairments in their respective churches and societies. With the publication of that document in 2003, the WCC recognized the importance of EDAN's work in this respect.

In the years since then EDAN has learned that *A Church of All and for All* has been useful to many of WCC's member churches, and that theological seminaries have used it widely in their teaching. Persons with impairments have grown in their capacity as agents of change, also within the ecumenical community. EDAN's position has changed in this respect. We are no longer demanding recognition from the margins of WCC. Even though for many persons living with impairment and their families the struggle for being included and accepted in their church communities continues, there are promising signs that inclusion and participation by all is more positively affirmed as part of God's gift.

These observations brought about the need for updating the first document. Our first consultation on the question took place in May 2013 in Nunspeet (The Netherlands). We concluded that in view of shifting positions it would be better to write a new document, and to opt for an approach in which the realities of "disability" experience are interpreted from the perspective of creation, making the notion of human creatureliness central to our theological reflections. Taking a different approach is not to deny the fact that many observations and assumptions in the previous document are still valid, and that marginalization and exclusion are far from being overcome. But it is to affirm the beginnings of changes that have occurred. Returning to Nunspeet in October 2014 for a second consultation, we found ourselves in full agreement with the notion of creation as the centre of our theological reflections on impairment and "disability."

This document is addressed to the ecumenical family of churches and their communities. We hope this new document will once again inform communities of faith, their leaders, students in theology, and their teachers, and inspire them to continue the work of becoming inclusive church communities. Much remains to be done in this respect. Our greatest hope is to be part of a church whose communities know how to receive the gift of being the body of Christ, and celebrate the rich variety in the giftedness of *all* of its members.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

The major part of the time and energy of the current CWME had been devoted to the planning and organization of the World Mission Conference held in Arusha, Tanzania (2018). The CWME is proud of the fact that the Arusha conference turned out to be a historic mission event and that its “Call to Transforming Discipleship” has touched the nerves of churches and ecumenical movements worldwide in a profound manner. Since the conference in Arusha, the CWME’s efforts have been mainly to offer further reflections on the theme of “transforming discipleship” in the changing and the changed global landscape. However, with the unexpected arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has changed drastically. The virus has quite literally paralyzed the world with implications for every aspect of our lives. The life and work of the CWME has been no exception. However, we have ensured that the commission’s work continued uninterrupted, particularly through the intense (online) work of its various working groups.

This publication is basically an outcome of the intense labour of the CWME working groups since the conference in Arusha and it intends to offer the following:

- Further reflections on the theme of transforming discipleship in the context following the Arusha conference
- A CWME contribution to the WCC assembly theme from a mission perspective

The WCC assembly in 2022 will reflect on the theme “Christ’s love moves the world to unity and reconciliation.” The theme has deep missiological ramifications. “Missionary discipleship” or “transforming discipleship” has its source of inspiration in Christ’s love (2 Cor. 5). The dialectical relationship between love and justice is what makes love (*agape*) a missiologically and theologically pertinent theme. In other words, it is the inherent presence of justice within love that enables it to turn the world upside down and bring about unity and reconciliation where division and hatred exist. Justice is the order that love requires. In this sense, we could paraphrase the biblical basis of the WCC assembly theme as “Christ’s love compels/urges/moves us to do justice” (2 Cor. 5:14). The aspect of Christ’s love moving the world also has mission resonance with the Arusha theme of transforming discipleship. As I tried to indicate in my address in Arusha, the New Testament

sense of being disciples of Jesus Christ, and therefore of discipleship itself, had to do with the mission of turning things upside down (Acts 17:6), particularly in the context of the (then Roman) empire. In the contemporary global context, empire is still in force through novel manifestations such as idolatry of Mammon, growing fascism, militarism, and the infectious virus of xenophobia expressed through the dominant politics of hatred and fear. In this context, the CWME has the responsibility to ensure that the dimension of *missio agape*—vis-à-vis confronting the empires of our times and turning the imperialist world order upside down—is not lost in the WCC articulations of the assembly theme.

The assembly theme also focuses on the concerns of unity and reconciliation. The specific emphasis on reconciliation brings back memories of the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Athens (2005). Reconciliation and unity are integrally interwoven in the New Testament. Paul, for instance, presents discipleship (mission) in terms of ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5). According to Paul, Christ has brought about reconciliation and unity through his death on the cross (Eph. 2:14) by dismantling the middle walls of partition. This has the potential to address the pressing global challenges that we encounter today. Reconciliation is a trinitarian state of being, a state of reconciled diversity and justice, where each entity within the trinitarian community enjoys dignity, equality, and justice. In this vision, there is no room for fear, hatred, and xenophobia because trinitarian love expressed on the cross of Christ is one that moves the world, removes fear and hatred, and thus turns the world upside down.

These are some of the crucial concerns this publication attempts to address. The book is meant to be a theological response to “the missionary imagination” that *The Arusha Call to Discipleship* evokes. It is also an effort to make sure that the mission/prophetic dimensions are not lost in the reflections on the WCC assembly theme. This aspect is highlighted through a fresh and a much more nuanced reading and application of the notion of “mission from the margins”—itself one of the defining features of the CWME/WCC mission statement, *Together towards Life*. The reflections offered by the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network also help to theologically solidify the aspects of transforming discipleship and *missio agape* through its articulations of an “ecclesia” where justice, dignity, inclusion and hospitality are the values that guide and govern the ecclesial life and ethics.

As the moderator of the CWME, I have great pleasure in writing these concluding comments on a significant publication of the commission. The

CWME is indebted to its working groups and their moderators and staff colleagues—including administrative staff, who have led the work efficiently throughout the trying conditions of the pandemic—for their hard and productive work and contributions. Our thanks are also owed to the Rev. Dr Risto Jukko, Director of CWME, for his committed leadership and dedicated efforts in ensuring that the book has been published in a professional manner. I hope and pray that the book will be received well and widely and that it will help transmit Christ's love—in turn igniting imaginations and commitments of a missionary nature in the hearts and minds of the readers. Many blessings.

Metropolitan Geevarghese Coorilos Nalunnakkal

Moderator

World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism

Parumala, India

1 July 2021

Call to Discipleship: Mission in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is a collection of study documents of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism 2018-2021. They give an overview of the state of the missiological thinking and practice of the ecumenical movement at the end of the 2010s and beginning of the 2020s. Each study document is preceded by a short introduction.

The study documents in the *Call to Discipleship: Mission in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* are based on two recent ecumenical mission affirmations. The first one is the WCC mission affirmation *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (2012). The second is undoubtedly one of the most inspiring ecumenical mission documents of the 2010s, *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*, an outcome document of the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism held in Arusha, Tanzania, in 2018. This book aims to deepen theological reflection on *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*. The Arusha Call as well as the Arusha Conference Report are included in this volume.

The study documents have been prepared by the thematic working groups of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, with the addition of a slightly earlier document of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN).



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