

# **PILGRIMS ON THE PATH OF PEACE**

## **THE JOURNEY OF THE WCC FROM BUSAN TO KARLSRUHE**

Approved by the World Council of Churches Central Committee,  
February 2022



Pilgrims on the Path of Peace  
The Journey of the WCC from Busan to Karlsruhe (Unillustrated)

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*WCC Publications is the book publishing programme of the World Council of Churches. The WCC is a worldwide fellowship of 352 member churches which represents more than half a billion Christians around the world. The WCC calls its member churches to seek unity, a common public witness and service to others in a world where hope and solidarity are the seeds for justice and peace. The WCC works with people of all faiths seeking reconciliation with the goal of justice, peace, and a more equitable world.*

*Opinions expressed in WCC Publications are those of the authors.*

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## Foreword by the Moderator of the WCC Central Committee

What have the world's churches been doing to confront and address today's most pressing problems? What might the ecumenical fellowship undertake to do in the future?

In a tradition that dates to the beginning of the World Council of Churches, we of the WCC's central committee offer to the next assembly this account and assessment of the council's work since its prior assembly, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, in October-November of 2013.

Rather than a straightforward chronology or a summary of its programmes, we have chosen in this report to review these years in light of the council's own five stated strategic goals and in light of its guiding motif of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

As a fellowship of 352 churches in 110 countries and representing more than half a billion Christians, the WCC in these years has continued its perennial quest for visible unity, grounded in our shared faith in God, our witness to the saving work of Jesus, and our imitation of his self-giving love for all humanity. That is who we are.

Yet we know, too, that the ecumenical vocation is not static but dynamic, a pilgrimage or sacred journey of new encounters and continual learning and discerning, always headed toward fuller unity, justice, and peace. In these extremely demanding times, praying, walking, and working together on this Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has allowed us to be risk-takers and to leave our comfort zones. It gives us the impetus to join other pilgrims for justice, to discover each other and the larger, deeper truths God will reveal on the way.

I hope that these chapters also convey something of the excitement and energy of these years, of the churches learning more about the regional contexts and local concerns through Pilgrim Team Visits, of the strong partnerships forged to collaborate for climate justice, of reflecting on the ecumenical convergence captured in the central concepts of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, of the engagements of the churches in the Colombian peace process or the racial reckoning in the USA, of the closer ties with the Roman Catholic Church as well as the World Evangelical Alliance, of the challenging vision of transformative discipleship, and of the innovative ways in which the WCC and its fellowship have stayed together in mission and ministry through the pandemic.

It has been my special honour in these years to serve the council and its member churches as moderator of the central committee. From my heart I thank all the members of the committee, colleagues in the leadership, and the thousands of dedicated Christians with whom I have been able to pray and walk and work in this time.

We hope that this recent past will serve as prologue to a creative and productive 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in September 2022. A lot has changed since a WCC assembly last convened in Europe, in 1968. At the same time, some of the issues addressed at Uppsala remain or have resurfaced, from racial injustice to gross inequalities and ongoing struggles with colonial legacies. In light of the particular perils we face now, at the assembly we will explore our role through the theme, "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity."

We hope that all our delegates and other participants will be able to attend the assembly, especially amid this COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to an enabling environment for prayer, celebration, discussions, exchange of views and ideas, as well as a glimpse of church life in Germany.

Our prayers are many: As a global ecumenical movement, it is our prayer that the assembly will energize and inspire churches to continue to work for the unity of the church and the unity of humankind. It is our prayer that we in the ecumenical movement will recommit to the goal of visible unity, so that, agreeing on critical aspects of our Christian faith, we one day we will worship together, accept each other's baptism, and celebrate the eucharist as one. We pray that many young people will find the WCC and ecumenical movement relevant as it addresses matters affecting them. We pray that assembly participants will give programme and policy priorities and direction for the future.

As we all reflect on how to further that unity, we hope you will find this report informative, thought-provoking, and even inspiring of an ever-stronger ecumenical fellowship, a bolder ecumenical witness, and a transformative engagement by all Christians for the human future. Please join me in praying:

*Jesus, our risen Lord and compassionate brother,  
Walk with us as we together in fellowship*

*seek your reign of justice,  
search your ways of peace, and  
share your love with everyone.*

*In all ways and always, draw us ever closer to you and your coming reign.  
Amen.*

**Dr Agnes Abuom**

## Spirit on the Move: The Evolving Ecumenical Movement

*We are marching in the light of God,  
We are marching in the light of God.  
Siyahamba ekukhanyen' kwenkhos<sup>1</sup>*

In Seoul, Republic of Korea, thousands of Christians gather for prayer and march in a candlelight procession for peace and reunification on the troubled peninsula. In Bangladesh, a team of delegates from Christian churches around the world visits Rohingya refugees from neighbouring Myanmar. In Jerusalem, Christians join in prayer for peace at a centuries-old abbey in the heart of the Old City. In Washington, D.C., protestors demand racial justice and policy initiatives to repair centuries of discrimination. In Rome, Christians from the Sant'Egidio community gather with refugees from the Middle East to celebrate holidays and the new humanitarian corridor through which they might envision new lives in a new home. In Paris, pilgrim youth from all continents meet to demand that nations commit to arresting climate change.

This dynamic engagement owes much to the century-long, worldwide ecumenical movement to bring Christians together—to overcome their divisions and differences, beyond their confessional boundaries and geographic borders—to renew, reform, and re-energize their churches and to nurture authentic discipleship for the sake of the kingdom of God on earth.

The ecumenical movement (from the Greek *oikoumené*, referring to the whole inhabited world) looks to the visible unity of the church to be a prophetic sign and a foretaste of the reconciliation of this world with God, and the unity of humankind and all creation. Its visual expression, the World Council of Churches (WCC), gathers 352 churches into fellowship that touches the lives of half a billion Christians around the world, inspired by Jesus' own prayer that his disciples may all be one (John 17:21), united in God, and in the mystery of God's triune life.

The ecumenical movement traces its roots back to student movements and missionaries in the 19th century who wished to overcome the scandal of division, competition, and even animosity among Christians, and to encounter their fellow Christians in an open, earnest search for the deepest shared truths of faith, and to become a force standing together for the life of the world.

They came together first in a landmark, mission-oriented gathering in 1910 in Edinburgh, Scotland. An additional spur was the visionary 1920 encyclical from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, urging the establishment of a league or fellowship between churches. That same year, assembled Anglican bishops in London issued their “Lambeth Appeal to All Christian People,” urging that Christians “should unite in a new and great endeavour to recover and to manifest to the world the unity of the Body of Christ for which he prayed.” The wind of renewal generated through such events led to bold efforts toward re-envisioning the churches' faith and order as well as its life and work in the world and, despite many years of world war and global depression, culminated in the founding of the WCC at its first assembly in 1948.

At that time, in the same era as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the WCC brought together 117 churches, largely from the global North, with the resolve to “stay together.” It seeded today's fellowship of three times as many churches, largely from the global South, with strong working relationships with evangelical churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The global fellowship of Christians became, as William Temple marvelled, “the great new fact of our era.”

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<sup>1</sup> South African traditional music and English and Zulu text.

Over the decades, that shared commitment has led to earnest encounter of Christians across denominational lines, to serious and sustained theological and biblical reflection on their understandings of Christianity's central mysteries—including baptism, the ministry, and the church—and to worldwide prayer for Christian unity. Embedded in countless dialogues, consultations, and agreements, new and deeper understandings of each other now inform Christians' amity, common prayer, and Bible study in ways and to an extent unimaginable a century ago.

Rooted in faith and in strong moral conviction, that commitment has also led to successive and consequential ecumenical engagements with an array of the world's most intractable problems: with human rights, the churches' lingering antisemitism, racism in apartheid South Africa, sexism in the churches and society, with HIV and AIDS and global health, care for creation, inclusion of disabled people, economic justice, interreligious divides, and with armed conflict, nuclear proliferation, and the daunting work of peacebuilding from Colombia to Nigeria, from Israel and Palestine to Tuvalu in the Pacific.

Ecumenical growth and momentum, especially in the decolonial and postcolonial decades from the founding of the WCC till the end of the century, have been driven by daring and activist assemblies, by the embrace of ecumenism by the Second Vatican Council, by the growing solidarity of the churches in service and advocacy, by the expanding network and increasing engagement of ecumenical partner agencies founded by the churches, and by the growing capacity of the churches to energize grassroots engagement while also addressing the very centres of international cooperation and power.

Along the way, the ecumenical movement has also confronted tensions within the fellowship, particularly over the shape and limits of church unity, the place of Orthodox churches in the ecumenical movement, and the widely varying stances of the churches on such issues as sexuality. Navigating such tensions has led to embracing a consensus form of decision-making that encourages real discernment by churches and genuine learning from persons and groups at the margins of society and church life.

Today the evolving role of the WCC situates it within a world Christianity that now has many centres. It still centres on *fostering unity* (convening and building community in the fellowship), *enabling public witness* (lifting the prophetic voices and actions of the churches in the public arena), and *facilitating service* (as a catalyst and strategic partner with the churches and specialized ministries). The dynamic movement that began with impatience and offence at divisions among Christians increasingly looks outward, leveraging the churches' solidarity to engage with the challenges of a world in peril.

That faith-inspired movement instils much-needed hope in our world's situation, said WCC general secretary Olav Fykse Tveit as he prepared to take up his position in May 2020 as presiding bishop of the Church of Norway. He offered an emphatic affirmation of “the vital character and crucial contribution of ecumenical Christianity today and the necessary role that the WCC is playing in it. I believe that the movement, essentially a vibrant renewal movement of the churches for the sake of the coming kingdom, has never been more relevant.”

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca was appointed as WCC acting general secretary until the end of December 2022, ensuring continuity in leadership to the WCC 11th Assembly. The acting general secretary serves with all authority and responsibility of general secretary to lead the work of the

WCC as chief executive officer, including final responsibility for the work of the Council and its staff, and to speak on its behalf.

Sauca, a priest of the Orthodox Church in Romania, has served as Professor of Missiology and Ecumenical Theology at Bossey since 1998 and as its director since 2001. He has served as a WCC deputy general secretary since 2014 in the areas of unity, mission, ecumenical relations, youth, interreligious dialogue and cooperation, worship and spirituality, as well as ecumenical formation.

From first to last, the ecumenical movement has been based on personal encounters across boundaries that changes minds, hearts, and lives. In its programmes and activities since its assembly in Busan in 2013, the WCC has invited Christians, Christian churches, and all people of good will to see their own journey of faith as a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, a sacred journey that engages us with the concrete contexts and evident needs of others, a journey that can transform us and the world. The importance of the role of the ecumenical movement and the WCC in holding Christians and churches together around the world has been seen in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with many activities and meetings now taking place online.

As this publication demonstrates, in its extensive preparation for its 11th Assembly, in 2022, in Karlsruhe the WCC is taking stock of what has been learned in the journey together since the 10th Assembly in Busan, to see where the love of God in Christ is leading us next in the quest for unity among Christians and reconciliation in the world.



## Stations on the Way: From Busan to Karlsruhe

When the World Council of Churches concluded its 10th Assembly in the fall of 2013, it emerged with a clear mandate to move together in solidarity with all those who strive for justice and peace and, in the words of its sending sermon by Rev. Michael Lapsley, to move from pain and lament to prophetic witness and hope.

This report describes the signal journey that the council and its member churches undertook after that gathering and how its activities and programmes have measured up to that mandate. The report gauges those years of ecumenical endeavour against the WCC's five strategic aims, articulated soon after the assembly:

- Strengthening the fellowship
- Public witness and *diakonia*
- Spirituality, formation, and prayer
- Building trust and understanding
- Inspiring and innovative communication

The chapter narratives capture some of the ambition, innovation, and excitement of the council's activities and relationships in these years, as well as its challenges, as it pursues its goal of visible Christian unity. They also exhibit ways in which the work of the council and the fellowship as a whole has evolved during these years and some characteristic trends in contemporary ecumenical engagement:

**1. Toward visible Christian unity.** At the core of the WCC's work is the pursuit of visible Christian unity, in faith and eucharistic fellowship, in mission and in service, to embody the prayer of Jesus that "they may all be one." Since the Busan assembly, the WCC as the privileged instrument of the ecumenical movement has continued to deepen the fellowship of its member churches while also continuing dialogue and sharing with the Roman Catholic Church, Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Together with the Roman Catholic Church, the WCC has prepared the resources shared each year globally for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

A major focus since the Busan assembly has been harvesting the responses of churches to the text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the convergence document that is the fruit of three decades of international ecumenical conversation. After analyzing almost 80 responses to the report, the Faith and Order Commission has prepared papers on 16 key controversial theological themes in these responses, published in 2021. The message to the churches on the meaning of the responses for their common life will feed into the Karlsruhe assembly. Continuing the quest for Christian unity, the Faith and Order Commission has been preparing for a Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, the first since 1993.

**2. Confluence of unity and justice agendas.** The years since Busan have brought together the council's unity and justice agendas, that is, the traditional "faith and order" quest for defusing division and creating ecclesial unity with the traditional "life and work" quest for social justice. The theme or motto of the gathering in Busan, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace," hinted at the future direction. In fact, the work of the assembly had been prepared through the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, held in Jamaica in 2011, where the "Just Peace" framework was adopted, offering a fulsome analysis of the many dimensions of peace, justice, and the human good.

The invitation of the Busan assembly to join a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace offered a new metaphor under which Christian churches everywhere could see their work for justice and peace – new or existing – as part of a larger quest, uniting churches everywhere in praying, walking, and working toward the God’s coming reign of justice and peace.

As detailed below and throughout this report, the pilgrimage presented not a new programme or initiative as such but a dynamic framework for the churches’ life and work, understood as a sacred journey of openness, encounter, learning, and collaboration toward the God of life and for a world of peace and justice.

The pilgrimage could draw on important insights of several ecumenical statements and studies, including the Just Peace framework, Faith and Order’s *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the landmark mission statement *Together towards Life*, and a years-long study of *diakonia*, “Called to Transformative Action: Ecumenical Diakonia,” which attempted to bridge the theological concepts of service with those of civil society and NGOs.

For churches, the pilgrimage has valorized local contexts and concerns, encouraged ecumenical collaboration, and tied their spiritual lives to their diaconal and outreach work. For the council, the pilgrimage motif has centred attention on what the churches can distinctively or even uniquely bring to the myriad of today’s issues: faith and hope. These perspectives converge in the recent Faith and Order study document *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*.

Few events capture the inspiration and power of the pilgrimage motif as well as the physical pilgrimages of Christians toward Paris and the climate summit, COP21, in 2015 (see page 52), and recently to COP26 in Glasgow.

**3. Intensified engagement of churches.** The ecumenical movement has always been the child of the churches themselves. During the period after Busan, churches and their specialized ministries have been even more deeply involved in formulating, planning, and fulfilling the initiatives and activities of the WCC.

This collaborative model recognizes that the world is multi-centred and that the fellowship of churches as a whole can support regional initiatives, advocate in the international arena, and build a worldwide network of concern around an issue.

Such is the case with the WCC’s persistent engagement during this period with issues of peace on the Korean Peninsula (see pages 44-46, 66, 83, etc.). Emerging from its Busan assembly with close working relations with Korea’s churches and the National Council of Churches of Korea, the leadership of the WCC and its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs have advocated with them for a formal end to the Korean War, reunification, and other visible actions for peace, leading to successive campaigns of prayer, a youth pilgrimage, and demonstrations for peace on the peninsula as well as a visit to Pyongyang, North Korea, by an ecumenical delegation, including the WCC general secretary in 2018 (see pages 28, 45).

An important and distinctive feature of the extended collaborations with the churches has been the centrality of ecumenical spirituality. Global prayer has been at the heart of recent initiatives, campaigns, and communications, from special days or weeks dedicated to prayer for Korean peace, food security, the peace in the Middle East, in addition to the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Ecumenical response to the pandemic, too, has highlighted shared prayer,

including special publications featuring prayers of lament and consolation, related Bible studies, and a daily morning prayer sent to the WCC's extensive communications network.

**4. Expanded partnerships** have also characterized this period. Extending its effective reach, even during a challenging financial period, the WCC has placed partnership relations at the centre of its programmes and initiatives. The period witnessed a revived working relationship with the Regional Ecumenical Organizations (page 40), as well as closer collaboration with the specialized ministries of many church bodies and with the ACT Alliance, the premier Christian agency for disaster relief and development aid (page 66), and well as such civil society initiatives as the Blue Communities.

An instructive illustration and promising model for such partnerships is the "Churches' Commitments to Children." Building on its longstanding relationships with the World Health Organization and with UNAIDS, the WCC has forged a close programmatic relationship with UNICEF for the protection of children. The WCC invited churches everywhere to join a global network enabling the protection of children, their increased participation in church life, and their active engagement in work for climate justice (see page 67).

Coalitions of regional churches with the WCC and civil society allies have successfully tackled such global issues as climate commitments, the UN Arms Trade Treaty (2014), and the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017), as well as relentlessly advocating for migrants, refugees, and the stateless.

**5. Transversal focus.** During these years, an innovative feature of WCC programming has been careful attention to those values that should undergird and characterize all its work. These include spirituality, gender justice, and interreligious understanding. Explicit attention to these concerns has enriched WCC activities, encouraging collaboration across programme lines. A Buddhist-Christian dialogue in 2015, for example, focused directly on gender justice and sexuality, while a study group of Faith and Order explicitly addresses theological dimensions of climate change. In July 2021, the council added race and countering racism as a further transversal concern.

**6. Heightened interreligious engagement.** Each day's headlines attest to the pertinence of interreligious understanding. While the ecumenical banner has always championed dialogue among and unity of the churches, increasingly, the broader interfaith and interreligious concerns of a pluralistic world directly affect global issues and Christian communities. The period since Busan has witnessed many interreligious initiatives and new or revived relations with groups from other faith communities. As the programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation passed its 50-year mark in 2021, it could point not only to ongoing consultations but also, for example, to training youth leaders in interreligious relations, issuing collaborative Jewish-Christian statements on the pandemic, and sponsoring joint Muslim-Christian peacemaking efforts in Nigeria (see page 49, 63-64).

Encounters with other religious traditions are offering Christians new opportunities for deeper theological understanding not only of the other traditions but also of their own. So, for example, in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the WCC issued a statement, *Serving a Wounded World*, on the Christian basis and urgent need for solidarity with other, non-Christian faiths (page 64).

**7. Convergence of global concerns.** The coronavirus pandemic has reinforced perceptions of the confluence of justice issues since infections, vaccinations, treatment, and governmental aid

have starkly divided along racial and economic lines. Inter-programmatic collaboration, attention to transversal concerns, and wider partnerships have enabled the council not only to leverage wider impact but also to work directly at the intersections of the most vital of global concerns. Race, violence, gender, global health, and climate—in some measure, addressing any of these systemic issues entails addressing them all.

A pioneer model of such an intersectional approach remains WCC's Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (WCC-EHAIA), which has responded to HIV and AIDS with medical information, pastoral counselling, training workshops, advocacy, and theological reflection on the deeper cultural issues of masculinity, femininity, and gender violence. The WCC's highly impactful Thursdays in Black campaign toward a world without rape and violence also illustrates the importance of effectively engaging a single vital issue in ways that also illuminate and confront related ones (see page 41, 70).

**8. Centrality of faith and hope.** Addressing the many systemic issues that imperil the lives of humans and the planet today requires an ample supply of selfless commitment such as faith-based communities bring to their benevolent work. The WCC and the Pilgrimage have served as a catalyst for local and global efforts to address climate change, economic injustice, and other challenges. This reality is increasingly acknowledged and welcomed by international agencies and governments. For example, WHO director Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in August 2021 lauded the roles of the WCC and faith communities, saying, “Faith communities have played a particularly important role for many people in the funding, trust, the sources of support, comfort, guidance, and information with the support of the COVID-19 solidarity response fund.”

But the WCC has found readier welcome in international agencies not only because religious communities are on the ground and prepared to pitch in but also because they nurture the hope-filled values, willingness for social change, and support for large-scale cultural shifts in attitudes about consumption, the health of the planet, or gender relations that justice and peace require.

As the World Council of Churches prepares for its 11th Assembly, and as the following chapters document, it is the strength of Christian faith and the witness to hope by the churches and their allies that promise a vital ecumenical contribution to humanity's survival and future.

## Messages from the Leadership of the Central Committee

At a time where the world faces a historic set of challenges, churches must step up and be seen and heard in the public space, now more than ever. As the weaving of the mat of life requires a common thread that holds the mat together, so the unity of the church brings strength and the string that holds us together is the love of Christ. This love enables unity of purpose, a common witness, and the ability to speak with one voice. The task ahead of us is huge, but so is the opportunity. Through God's grace, "We are committed to stay and move together!"

—**Dr Agnes Abuom**, moderator of the WCC central committee

We are looking forward to the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe as an opportunity for the churches to affirm their commitment to work for visible unity and Christian fellowship, a pilgrimage from which no one is excluded. We are all the people of God, and despite our being divided, God's grace reaches out to all God's children. We believe that in spite of this divided world, God's promise stands.

—**HE Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima (Limouris)**, vice-moderator of the WCC central committee

Ecumenical life has always been a part of who I am. Through my involvement with the World Council of Churches, I have greatly enjoyed encountering Christian churches uniting in Christ, Christians of different traditions who can come together in an ecumenical world and try to work together. And I'm very grateful that the WCC has been playing a full part in the Thursdays in Black campaign for a world without rape and violence. It's a step toward peace in our whole pilgrimage toward peace and justice.

—**Bishop em. Mary Ann Swenson**, vice-moderator of the WCC central committee

## A Fellowship in the Midst of a Pandemic

Little did the world realize, when the first rumours about a new virus started spreading late in 2019, how devastating and profound the effects of this virus would be.

In the months and, later, years that followed, millions became infected, lives were lost, economies devastated, and the world changed forever. A new vocabulary developed – lockdowns, quarantine, isolation, and social distancing became part of everyday conversation.

Governments announced restrictions and emergency measures. Local and international travel came to a standstill. Offices stood empty as those who could worked from home. Shops were shuttered. Cities fell silent.

Certainly, faith communities and the global fellowship of the World Council of Churches could not remain untouched. Gatherings of people of faith, traditionally a source of comfort and sustenance in challenging times, were halted.

People who were ill were isolated, separated from their families; even spiritual visits and care were prohibited. Hospitals and healthcare systems became overwhelmed in many regions as the numbers of those who were sick and dying continued to rise.

### **The challenges continue**

In addressing the central committee in June 2021, WCC moderator Dr Agnes Abuom sketched a dire picture: “The global economy is in crisis with a likely unequal recovery – COVID-19 has, with alarming speed, delivered a global economic shock. It has had devastating effects on women, the young, the poor, people employed informally, and those working in contact-intensive sectors.”

She said that per capita incomes in the vast majority of emerging markets and developing economies shrank in 2020, tipping many millions back into poverty. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), there was an estimated 3.5 percent contraction in global GDP in 2020 – the deepest global recession since the Second World War.

“With more effective infection control and vaccine deployment, the world economy is expected to recover in 2021,” she stated. “However, the speed and strength of the recovery will largely vary across regions depending on access to medical interventions, the effectiveness of policy support, exposure to cross-country spillovers, and structural characteristics of countries entering the crisis.”

At the same time, COVID-19 has amplified existing inequalities, Dr Abuom noted, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, and has exacerbated gender-based violence against women and girls. Meanwhile, as the vaccine rollout takes shape, she stated, the wealthiest nations continue to secure billions of doses of COVID-19 vaccines while developing countries have been struggling to access supplies.

### **And yet...**

And yet, her remarks did not end here. She also shared words like trust, resilience, relationships, compassion, empathy and most importantly, hope.

Yes, the church was challenged. And yet, the church did not close; the fellowship of churches did not close. Rather, the church stretched and expanded into new ways of doing and new ways of being.

Since this new pandemic started, the World Council of Churches has emphasized its work to equip the world's churches to address the healthcare and pastoral challenges posed by the pandemic and to minister in the presence of illness, death, and enormous disruption everywhere, and it did this while working remotely.

Doing this, the WCC could draw on the deep historical identification of churches and the WCC with health and healing, something that has existed since the early years of the church, and more recently, through the lived experiences of Ebola and HIV.

A WCC ministry support team was rapidly assembled to respond to the many pastoral questions and concerns in local and regional settings. The team of nine WCC staff, with expertise in different programmatic areas, was available to consult on churches' roles during the coronavirus pandemic, how they can adapt as faith communities, and how they can connect and share with each other. This service quickly became a much-used resource for churches, pastors, and individuals around the world.

### **Moving online**

Given the curtailment of local and international staff travel, much of the effectiveness of the work of the WCC rested on a rapid and effective shift to online and electronic platforms through which the fellowship could share stories, report on COVID-related initiatives, and highlight promising practices among churches responding to COVID-19. They have brought to light concrete examples of how faith communities are and can be adapting.

The fruit of a long process, the new website launched in this challenging time, was particularly valuable. Visits to the WCC website increased by more than 50 percent in 2020 compared to 2019, totalling more than 1.3 million visits by more than a million visitors in 2020, now further increased by our new website.

Digital innovations have also enabled the WCC's many programmes to work together virtually with their key constituencies, often on COVID-related issues. The result has been webcasts, podcasts, blog posts, and webinars exploring not just the immediate healthcare and ministerial challenge of the pandemic but also its implications for rethinking related issues of social justice, human rights, racial and gender equality, violence against women and children, and good governance.

Many initiatives originally planned as in-person, collaborative events moved to digital platforms. Despite the loss of personal contact, these events were often accessible to people who would otherwise be excluded due to international travel costs and challenges.

These events focus on many of the inequalities and inequities that were exacerbated by the pandemic. In just one example, a webinar brought together economists, activists, and church representatives to explore how tax justice and reparations – as called for in the ecumenical Zacchaeus Tax (ZacTax) campaign – could help the world attain a just and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Sharing lives and sorrows**

News stories and virtual events became opportunities to share lives, challenges, and sorrows. The fellowship heard about the social challenges in politically troubled Latin America, where democracy was at risk, and pre-pandemic problems put vulnerable communities at even greater risk. They shared their concern about increasing cases of violence against women and the threats to children's futures. They heard how online ecumenical retreats emerged as an alternative place for spiritual dialogue, such as the "Quiet Days" retreats in Sweden, where participants join online in a digital room to share a moment of stillness and reflection. They shared in the sorrow at the deaths and celebrated the lives of many faith leaders who died of COVID-related complications. In many regions, faith and interfaith collaboration increased, such as the Religious Forum Against COVID-19 in South Africa, where faith leaders stood in solidarity in response to COVID-19, and when they became available, in support of vaccines.

Enhanced use of social media in this period has amplified the message of the WCC but, as important, engaged people, especially in campaigns of solidarity and spirituality. The WCC's identity as a fellowship united in prayer and service has been made more visible through the publication of daily morning prayers, and weekly prayer texts contributed by members of the fellowship, both widely shared in social media and beyond.

### **Responding to the particular need for prayer**

The WCC acting general secretary, Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, highlighted the particular call for spiritual resources in this time: "As many churches adapted to online prayer and worship, the WCC also adapted by providing opportunities for global prayer, regional prayer and daily prayer. This has been among the most inspiring developments – to be more deeply connected through prayer – to pray for one another and to pray together for our churches and our world."

In March 2021, WCC coordinated a week of prayer to commemorate a year since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the spread of COVID-19 a pandemic. A resource book, *Voices of Lament, Hope, and Courage* was published in four languages as a resource for use in prayer groups, congregational services, personal prayer, and in the pastoral accompaniment of those directly affected in different ways by the pandemic.

Several other important publications have been produced, focusing particularly on equipping the fellowship to respond to the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

An Ecumenical Global Health COVID-19 Response Framework laid out parameters of care. A joint statement on *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action during COVID-19 and Beyond* was issued with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. And *Healing the World: Eight Bible Studies for the Pandemic Era* invited Christians to wrestle with their fear, grief, and uncertainty from a biblical perspective. A special virtual issue of the WCC journals further focused on the pastoral and theological challenges posed by the pandemic.

### **Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace**

In the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were opportunities to reflect on the particular journey of the WCC fellowship as pilgrims on a journey of justice and peace through a series of online consultations with the WCC member churches and regional ecumenical organizations in Africa, Europe, Latin America, Asia, the Pacific, Caribbean and the Middle East. In these consultations, participants used the methodology familiar from physical visits and shared their



pain, celebrated successes, and explored opportunities for transformation through virtual methodologies

In every region, it was clear that the pandemic amplified humanitarian problems, disrupted lives and livelihoods disproportionately, increased inequities, impacted the poor and vulnerable communities such as people with disabilities, Black, Indigenous and Minority Ethnic communities. Conflicts continued unabated, and peacebuilding efforts have also been hampered. Violence against women and girls increased, as did mental health problems among the youth. Humanitarian aid has been disrupted.

In all regions, the churches have lost leaders and members to the pandemic. Pastors, along with other essential services personnel, are under tremendous strain, requiring support and accompaniment.

As a positive response, the pandemic has hastened the use of social media technology, especially in delivering sermons, keeping the church's mission alive under challenging circumstances. Many pastors and church workers have had to sharpen their skills in this area. In all regions, churches and their ministries have shown resilience as they have continued providing their religious and diaconal services amidst the pandemic. Families have had more time together at home, and many reports indicate that family prayers and fellowship have become more defined. Participants emphasized the transformational nature of the church, and that church is not a building, but what happens through the people.

### **Governance challenges**

The pandemic caused particular challenges for the governance of the WCC. It required deep reflection, broad consultation, and careful discernment to find solutions to governance issues. Many of the issues were totally new, with high potential risks and existing constitutional frameworks that did not address the unprecedented circumstances.

In April 2020, the executive committee had to address four urgent matters; delegation of the authority to the leadership of the central committee to make decisions on some issues, the appointment of an acting general secretary; the postponement of the central committee meeting; and the implementation of the WCC rule allowing consultation and decision making using electronic communications. The 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, scheduled for 2021, also had to be postponed.

The June 2021 meeting of the central committee was its first meeting using electronic communications. Some members used Zoom for the first time, and many members participated in the middle of the night in their local time.

Despite the challenges, meaningful progress could be made, and the work of the WCC continued.

### **Multilateral cooperation**

The response of the WCC and its fellowship was not only focused inwards. From the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva and its office at the UN in New York City, the WCC has forged strong and productive collaborative programmatic initiatives with key agencies of the UN, most prominently the WHO and UNAIDS, UNICEF, the UNHCR, and the ILO. In the time of the pandemic, these collaborations were increased and strengthened.

The WCC quickly identified concerns about vaccine equity and, in December 2020, joined with the World Jewish Congress in a joint statement inviting religious leaders of all traditions and locations to reflect on and engage the myriad of ethical issues related to global vaccine distribution.

In April 2021, the WCC appointed nine church leaders to join 300 other “Vaccine Champions” mobilized by UNICEF to raise awareness of the benefits of vaccination, counter misinformation, and nurture trust in the vaccination programmes.

The WCC leadership emphasized that, as COVID-19 vaccination programmes are being rolled out, religious leaders of all faiths play a critical role in sustaining public trust in health authorities and services, as well as in the approved vaccines themselves.

The ecumenical fellowship was encouraged to publicly challenge rumours and myths about vaccination and the pandemic and counter them with facts. As moral and ethical concerns loomed over vaccine access and distribution practices, church leaders were encouraged to take responsibility and advocate for equitable access from a medical, ethical, and human rights perspective.

### **Toward a just response to the pandemic**

Despite the formidable challenges that the pandemic has posed to the WCC, its effectiveness as a convenor of the worldwide fellowship of churches, as a catalyst for public witness, and as a community working in solidarity for justice and peace has, in many respects, been enhanced during these straitened circumstances. On several occasions, the WCC leadership has emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted many inequalities among humanity and yet provided an opportunity for more communication with World Council of Churches member churches and partners in different ways.

In May 2021, the WCC executive committee released a public statement urging the world to come together to “Overcome Global Injustice and Inequity, to Defeat the Global COVID-19 Pandemic.”

This statement called on governments, agencies, religious leaders, corporations with ownership of patents and materials to exercise leadership and act together urgently to ensure broad, rapid, equitable, and affordable distribution of treatments and vaccines worldwide to overcome this failure and right this wrong. Highlighting the technical and supply chain issues around vaccine distribution, the statement emphasized the many “other factors that have intensified the impacts of the pandemic and as yet stand in the way of an exit from this crisis.”

### **A fellowship working toward unity**

In her address to the June 2019 central committee, Dr Abuom underlined the importance of the WCC fellowship in responding to the pandemic.

“We are in a situation, when as a church, as a fellowship, we need to lift the hopes of the people. The focus of our ministry is hope amidst hopelessness; it is love amidst division, separation and loss of life,” she said.

“As the enormous task of vaccinating, protecting, and aiding the world’s population continues to tax health and economic systems, we are committed as a fellowship, to stay together and move together irrespective of the challenges that we face.”

At a conference held in Berlin in October 2021, discussing the role of faith communities in health and healing, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Fr Sauca reflected on what the WCC has learned in this time: “We have learned the real importance of our work, not in spite of our faith identity but because of it. Our identity as a global Christian fellowship enables us to address this crisis in its deeper cultural and spiritual dimensions, to break barriers and build bridges, and to work relationally. In particular: The pandemic has revealed or reinforced our shared vulnerability but also our fundamental community as humans, our solidarity across divides and borders, and our capacity for empathy, understanding, and even heroic sacrifice.”

He went on to mention promising new elements for the work of faith communities: “The fundamental learning from this pandemic has been of our shared vulnerability—and shared fate—as one humanity. We now feel more keenly the fragility of human life—indeed, of all life on this planet. Consequently, now we all more consciously value the deep connections we share with each other in family and community, nation, and world. We now evince a new openness to admitting and confronting historic injustices and a new moral reckoning on race, class, and gender. We also more readily acknowledge and celebrate the concerns and insights of women, youth, Native peoples, and those who are routinely victimized by our economic systems and systems of healthcare, immigration, asylum, and policing.”

In such ways, he continued, “perhaps the pandemic will seed a new readiness for real social change and commitment to our one humanity in this one world. Let us build on that!”

## The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: an invitation to move together

*“We intend to move together. Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we challenge all people of good will to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions. This Assembly calls you to join us in pilgrimage. May the churches be communities of healing and compassion, and may we see the Good News so that justice will grow and God’s deep peace rest on the world.”<sup>2</sup>*

Since the 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013, these words have motivated the expression of the common calling of the WCC as a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

As already described in this report (page 10), the pilgrimage presents not a new programme or initiative but rather a dynamic framework for the churches’ life and work, understood as a sacred journey of openness, encounter, learning, and collaboration toward the God of life and for a world of peace and justice - expressed across the range of WCC programmes and initiatives.

In its first meeting of the WCC central committee after the Busan assembly, the committee approved a strategic plan based on the assembly mandate. In this strategic plan, the overall objectives of the council for the period between Busan and Karlsruhe were identified: Strengthening the fellowship, witnessing together, encouraging spirituality, building trust, and understanding, and inspiring and innovative communication. These objectives also form the structure of this report. The ethos of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace permeates all these objectives, and the activities are reflected throughout this report.

Although the Pilgrimage is a way of being, rather than a way of doing, specific expressions, initiatives, and support structures developed in the pilgrimage, and specific insights were gleaned in this period. These are highlighted here.

A Reference Group of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace guided this process, and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace-Theological Study Group continued to reflect on the theological implications of this journey and the themes that developed.

### **Expressions of the pilgrimage**

Three well-known movements were identified as expressions of the Pilgrimage: *via positiva*, *via negativa*, and *via transformativa*. These dimensions guided many encounters along the way and structured reflections. These three different yet inseparably related dimensions are not to be understood sequentially, but rather in a dynamic way:

#### *Celebrating the Gifts (via positiva)*

We do not journey with empty hands, nor do we walk alone. The “original blessing” of being created in the image of God and together – as a fellowship – means that we are a unique part of the broader web of life. Together we celebrate God’s great gift of life, the beauty of creation and the unity of a reconciled diversity. We feel empowered by this grace of participating in God’s movement of love, justice and peace. We receive in prayer.

#### *Visiting the Wounds (via negativa)*

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<sup>2</sup> Message of the 10th Assembly

This pilgrimage leads us to the locations of violence and injustices. Here we look for God's incarnated presence amid suffering, exclusion, and discrimination. The true encounter with real, contextual experiences of a broken creation and of sinful human behaviour might inform us anew about the essence of life itself. It leads to repentance and – in a movement of purification – liberate us from the obsession with power, possessions, ego, and violence, so that we become ever more Christ-like. We listen in prayer.

Transforming the Injustices (*via transformativa*)

Being transformed ourselves, the pilgrimage leads us to concrete actions of transformation, where we grow in our courage to live in true compassion with one another and with nature. This includes the strength to resist evil, injustice and violence, even if a church finds itself in a minority situation. Economic and ecological justice, healing the wounded, and striving for peaceful reconciliation is our call – in every context. The credibility of our actions grows from the quality of the fellowship we share – a fellowship *of* justice and peace. We are transformed through prayer and act in prayer.

### **Regional focus**

Regions were identified as the focus for each year. These areas became the focus for the range of WCC activities as well as for physical and virtual Pilgrim Team Visits.

Israel/Palestine (and the Middle East) - 2016

Nigeria (and other places in Africa) - 2017

Colombia (and other places in Latin America and the Caribbean) - 2018

Thailand (and other places in Asia) - 2019

Fiji (and other places in the Pacific) - 2020

North America - 2021

### **The Role of Women and Young People**

The role of women on the Pilgrimage was emphasized early in this period.

A seminar “Women’s Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace—Inspired by UNSR1325,” was held in June 2014, sponsored by the Ecumenical Institute Bossey. With young women mostly from conflict areas as participants, it focused on making UNSCR1325 accessible to religious women to build their capacity in advocacy and awareness raising on issues that affect them.

UNSR1325 is the UN Security Council resolution that mandates focus on and involvement of women in post-conflict arrangements for peacebuilding and reconstruction, a key asset for developing or restoring gender justice in war-torn areas that have witnessed large-scale gender violence.

Throughout the Pilgrim Visits, the role of women and of gender justice continued to be emphasized, as shown throughout this report. On the visit to Korea, in May 2015, a group of international women peace activists revived the International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament, by walking a pilgrimage in and around the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating North and South Korea.

Young people also had a specific focus in the visit to Korea. Here and elsewhere (as described in this report) young people played a particular role on calling people of faith to greater activity and involvement in ecological justice.

The involvement of young people in the Pilgrimage is suitably reflected by the publication of “The Africa We Pray for on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,” a publication highlighting the voices of young people from Africa, as the first publication in a series co-published with Globethics.net.

## Themes

During the annual regional focus, and particularly the Pilgrimage Team Visits, four central themes emerged, each raised in different ways by the various hosting communities: truth and trauma, land and displacement, gender justice, and racism.

Since the 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013, the ecumenical peacebuilding process in Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel and Palestine, Iraq, the Korean Peninsula, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine has strengthened the ecumenical bonds in our common journey of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and empowered the theological reflection on the intersectionality of the four themes.

### *Truth and Trauma*

It became clear that justice comes when truth is revealed and acknowledged, and only then is peace possible. In this process, one will inevitably encounter the darkness of human misery and violence, with experiences that embed trauma within victims, survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators, and the communities they belong to.

Although truth should be liberating and even restoring, it can be twisted, manipulated and become divisive when claimed from only one perspective and exclusively understood from that position.

During the Pilgrimage, participants realized that understanding truth requires placing it within a dialogue, in relation to other people, and with the interdependence of different narratives, even opposing ones. Truth-telling is always relational.

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace reflection on truth and trauma in different contexts brought to light topics like forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation and called people of faith to action.

*“The truth remains that no battle is ever won by force. In every similar struggle, there are times to take breaks to evaluate, review strategies, and opt for dialogue. When dialogue is out of place, abuse of intention is unavoidable. The war Nigerians are fighting is more than the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, and having gained the attention of the government and seeing that they are gradually minding the request of the youth, it is expedient to have some recess to rework strategies—especially so as not to lose focus in this special liberation moment that has been built during the protests almost across the country.”*

—**Brother Adebayo Anthony Kehinde**, international vice president of the Youth Ministry of The Church of the Lord (Prayer Fellowship) Worldwide and member of the WCC’s Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), WCC blog November 2020.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/perspective-to-end-special-anti-robbery-squad-protests-in-nigeria>

## ***Land and Displacement***

It became clear that struggles related to land are rooted in the perception that some have more right to the land than others. These conflicts come in many forms: from the first colonizing movements claiming “new territory” (and its people) as their own, to national governments selling natural resources—including land and water (an integral part of creation), to multi-national companies stripping and exploiting land and water sources making them uninhabitable for indigenous people, to people thinking they have more right to the land because their ancestors have lived there, resulting in rejection and discrimination towards those people who migrate to the land.

During the Pilgrimage, participants reflected that such colonization, corruption, and exploitation of the land—and the waters—and its people result in the displacement of indigenous people, the disconnection of communal belonging, and the realities of slavery, human trafficking and severe poverty, and cause violence (in many forms), inequality and discrimination. One of the latest outcomes of the failure to take good care of the land is forced migration due to climate change.

The issues of land and displacement were vital in the stories and experiences shared by the communities during Pilgrim Team Visits to Nigeria, Colombia and the Thai-Myanmar border.

*“The communities around us saw each other. They know that those who protest are not alone. We brought them hope, we told them that God is accompanying them in their struggle, and we gave them words of encouragement in the midst of their struggle. We invite our churches to continue praying and to accompany this situation with a solidarity and concrete presence, since the solution to this complex reality in our country seems uncertain.”*

—**Rev. Gloria Ulloa Alvarado**, Presbyterian Church of Colombia and WCC president for Latin America and the Caribbean, reporting on an ecumenical solidarity visit to communities in Cali, May 2021.<sup>4</sup>

## ***Gender Justice***

It became clear that women still continue to be abused, violated, and oppressed. The often heroic actions of individuals and organizations cannot, by itself, bring the transformation the world needs. The prophetic voices of those often quietened by unjust systems cry out for an end to all the words and structures that keep women silent, indoors, and powerless and call people of faith and goodwill to bring about deep and lasting change.

During the Pilgrimage, participants realized the challenges faced by different churches in creating a healthy dialogue on issues such as the role of women in church and society, participation of women in leadership, sexual violence against women and children in homes, institutions and public spaces, sexual discrimination, and sexual orientation. Social structures ensuring that women are not accorded their full human dignity and destiny are still often in place, and there are signs of a backlash against steps already taken.

Where faith is co-opted to justify an unjust status quo, people of faith are called to conversion.

*“My focus changed from seeing women and girls as victims to understanding that they are survivors. This is also my experience during my travels around the world. Women may be abused or oppressed, but*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/in-colombia-what-is-happening-is-terribly-painful>

*somehow they find strength and perseverance to live, to raise children, to build community. What they need is solidarity from men and women around the world.”*

—**Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker**, from the Netherlands, WCC blog September 2019.<sup>5</sup>

## **Racism**

It became clear that we are challenged to continue to confront racism, understood as a combination of discrimination and power<sup>6</sup> where the disproportionate distribution of power preserves the privilege of one racial group and denies the flourishing of another group, thus ensuring inequities across generations became clear.

Both racism and current expressions of ethnic discrimination can be understood as consequences of colonialism. The colonial project has set not only a structure in a given period but a trajectory that keeps reproducing itself in different forms in different contexts, which makes it sometimes challenging to recognize it.

In the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the call to fight racism became primarily a call to the churches themselves. Where faith communities are part of systems symbolized by white privilege, they need to confront these structures and engage in repentance, and together work to actively heal and transform the realities of discrimination, xenophobia, and racism as part of the call to metanoia.

*“We are all in this together’ now includes care about the unreconciled sufferings, both historic and contemporary, that are encompassed in the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement. The linkages between the pandemic, climate justice and an end to racism are more vivid. Public discussion has more gravitas. People are looking for wise, capable leadership because survival is at stake!”*

—**Bishop Philip Huggins**, president of the National Council of Churches in Australia and director of the Centre for Ecumenical Studies at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, WCC blog, July 2020.<sup>7</sup>

## **Reflecting theologically**

At each station of the Pilgrimage from 2014 to 2021, the PJP Reference Group and the PJP Theological Study Group – after listening carefully – revisited the themes and reflected on them theologically to inform an emerging “**Ecumenical Theology of Companionship**.” Economic greed and the related human-made climate change are root causes for forced migration and the resultant displacement and struggles for land and natural resources. Very often, the experienced violence results in long-term trauma. In the search for human dignity and a life in peace with justice, individuals and communities in all parts of the world are struggling for gender justice and against racism.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/a-year-participating-in-thursdaysinblack>

<sup>6</sup> The World Council of Churches and the Vatican organized in Rome, September 2018, a conference on “*Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration*”. The final message resulting from the conferences defines **race** as “...a social construct which claims to explain and justify the separation between human groups by advancing physical, social, cultural and religious criteria”, and **racism** as “...the systemic and systematic impact of actions taken against groups of people based on the colour of their skin. It separates people from each other in the name of a false notion of the purity and superiority of a specific community. It is an ideological stance expressed through marginalization, discrimination and exclusion against certain persons, minorities, ethnic groups or communities”.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/message-from-the-conference-xenophobia-racism-and-populist-nationalism-in-the-context-of-global-migration-19-september-2018>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/covid-19-climate-justice-black-lives-matter-what-are-the-links-and-complexities>



*“So I have thought again and opened my eyes to a new view of the history of my land. And my feet have found again the ancient paths and the holy places. And in walking and visiting and praying, with my own tired feet and pilgrim’s limbs, I have found something of God. My faith is no longer just in my head or in my books, but in my body and in the world around me, in the stories of ancient and modern saints, and in the journey that takes me where I had little thought to go, worshipping in words and songs not once mine.”*

—**Rev. Dr Susan Durber**, United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom,  
moderator of the WCC’s Commission on Faith and Order, WCC blog March 2016.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/ive-rediscovered-pilgrimage>

## Interviews with the General Secretary Emeritus and Acting General Secretary

### Unity as a Gift and Unity as a Task

Interview with the Most Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches 2010–2020

*The Most Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit was elected WCC general secretary in August 2009, taking up his post in January 2010. At the time of his election he was general secretary of the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, and was a member of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order and co-chair of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum core group. He was consecrated presiding bishop of the Church of Norway in May 2020.*

**You were the general secretary of the World Council of Churches from 2010 to 2020. What do you see as the main milestones for the WCC during this period?**

The assembly in Busan in 2013 was a very significant milestone, as was the WCC's 70th anniversary in 2018; not only the events in themselves but being expressions of the WCC as a genuine global fellowship of churches. This was certainly very visible in Busan. And the Busan assembly, in particular, showed just how much this fellowship of churches is a fellowship of churches committed to justice and peace.

The theme of the Busan assembly – “God of life, lead us to justice and peace” – focused on justice and peace in a way that strengthened the dimension of unity in the WCC. It was very important that the assembly theme was formulated as a prayer to the God of life. It was an inclusive prayer to God as creator, redeemer, and life-giver. The call to work for justice and peace is a genuine God-given call. And expressing this work of the WCC through the image of pilgrimage helped raise this faith dimension.

In 2018, we saw a genuine manifestation of the one ecumenical movement, expressed most significantly by the presence of Pope Francis at the central committee for a whole day. I sense he acknowledged the WCC as a shepherd of the one ecumenical movement when he said, “I come as a pilgrim.” In his address, he stressed the mission of the church, and this reminds us that the whole ecumenical movement has its identity and is only properly understood if we see it as a genuine part of God's mission. The 70th anniversary of the WCC was marked, of course, not only by the pope's visit but by a great variety of events that showed the diversity of this one ecumenical movement that still unites us in a common agenda. That's why I think 2018 was a milestone, not only because of the visit of Pope Francis but in the way that it demonstrated that we are “one ecumenical movement.”

Another manifestation of the one ecumenical movement has been the relationship with our Pentecostal partners and the World Evangelical Alliance. This has developed into something more than just a polite conversation. I was invited by the Pentecostal World Fellowship to all their global events, and the World Evangelical Alliance has focused on what we can do together. We realized that much of our agenda has more in common than we may have thought.

**Perhaps the most visible outcome of the Busan assembly was the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. How has the Pilgrimage been able to help contribute to creating a more just and peaceful world, more just and peaceful communities?**

I see at least three results of having this focus on a pilgrimage of just peace. One was undoubtedly the strong message that the work of the World Council of Churches for unity is about reconciliation and unity among people.

Second, the pilgrimage is about just peace among us as a human family. The pilgrimage is a call to people of faith and goodwill, so this includes our work for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. This is not just a side issue, but it belongs to the centre of our existence as churches, and in recent years the interfaith dimension has become increasingly important. With the pilgrimage, we said, “We are pilgrims as Christians seeking peace, but so are people in other faith communities, and our religious convictions and traditions must not be misused to politicize.”

Third, we saw that our work together as Christians for justice and peace must have its roots in our faith and that the pilgrimage can lead to new forms of practising our faith, such as with the climate pilgrimage before the climate summit in Paris in 2016. Another example has been the pilgrim team visits to “visit the wounds” of situations of conflict and injustice in different parts of the world. The visits identify us with those suffering; we are not coming to say we are here to solve the issues, but instead: What can we contribute with others, from being churches together, from our existence as faith communities committed to human unity and solidarity?

So the pilgrimage has helped us to strengthen our commitment. And we found a new language, a language that is not triumphalist.

**The WCC is a fellowship of churches around the world, but it is also seen as an international organization based in Geneva. How has the WCC strengthened the cooperative community of international organizations, the UN specialized agencies, and other bodies?**

The assembly in Busan gave us a renewed mandate to strengthen cooperation with international multilateral organizations with which we share a common agenda. I think our partners have discovered the role played by civil society in many places and that churches have access to people’s daily lives in a different way than they have. They have seen that if a pastor preaches about justice every week, about human rights, the dignity of children, or the need to get vaccinated, they can reach more people than by acting by themselves.

I would particularly highlight our cooperation with UNICEF in the Churches’ Commitment to Children. It was very, very encouraging to see that many of our member churches explicitly said they wanted to be part of this project, many more than in similar projects in the past. If churches say there should be no violence against children or that we are focusing on children’s rights because this is the way Jesus relates to children, then we can offer a genuinely faith-based motivation. This is a good example of how we can provide a new dimension to the agenda of a UN body. They have also challenged us when they have asked how we actually care for children’s rights in the way we operate in our teaching and our practices. I have seen how we have been able to overcome mutual scepticism and transform it into cooperation.

I would also highlight our long-term work with UNAIDS and with the World Health Organization, which has been re-energized and has become so significant in recent months. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown just how important it is that there is good cooperation at this international level.

I would also mention our work for human rights and the Human Rights Council, especially the work on preventing genocide, as well as our work with the United Nations Development Programme, and, of course, our role in the COP meetings.

**Before you became WCC general secretary, you were the co-chair of the Palestinian Israel Ecumenical Forum, and so you brought this experience with you. What role would you say the WCC has been able to play in Israel and Palestine since the Busan assembly?**

I think the most concrete answer is that we managed to continue the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). This has offered a very practical approach as an expression of solidarity to local communities in their struggle for peace and in their struggle of living under occupation, in accompanying children to school, reporting to the UN and others what is happening, and observing what happens in daily life. The other dimension has been continuing to support our member churches through our presence, visits, raising their issues in the ecumenical and the broader political context, and through showing Christian solidarity with our Christian sisters and brothers in the region. We have said, “We will not forget you, and we ask all our member churches to continue to strengthen their commitment to support you.”

At least to some extent, I think we have been able to keep the movement together. There have been different, very different ideas about our work. How far should we go in terms of calling for a general boycott of Israel? This was an ongoing question, as there was of how to support peace initiatives where we relate to Israeli partners. How do we strengthen Christian-Jewish-Muslim relations locally and globally so that we are working together for the same peace?

The WCC has been in the middle of these discussions and has tried to keep them going constructively, even if it has been difficult. We could have taken one line, dividing our constituency and demonstrating that we could not support the initiatives for peace in the way we wanted. On the other hand, we were sometimes criticized for not being consistent enough or radical enough. This has been a significant but challenging task, but I don't think the WCC had any other option.

**Another international situation where the WCC has had a strong profile since the Busan assembly is the Korean Peninsula. What has been the role that the WCC has played here?**

The WCC has had a very long involvement in the Korean situation, and not only since Busan. I think a major part of the reasons for having our assembly in Korea was to explore how to work with the Korean churches for peace on the Korean Peninsula. The WCC is one of the very few actors in the global arena that has a real connection in both the South and in the North, has access to the North, and has confidence on both sides. It was very encouraging that we were able to visit the North Korean capital of Pyongyang after the summit between the leaders of North and South Korea in 2018. We need to be humble about our role, but I do think the WCC has a role in creating a lasting peaceful relationship between the two Korean states.

**In the past, many commentators have spoken of an "ecumenical winter," but when Pope Francis visited the WCC in 2018, he said he looked forward to the blossoming of a new ecumenical spring. So how do you see the change in ecumenical seasons?**

Pope Benedict XVI in 2011 and then Pope Francis in 2016 invited religious leaders, including those from the WCC, to Assisi to mark the anniversary of John Paul II's interfaith initiative in 1986. I think it was a recognition that we cannot work together as a church or as an ecumenical fellowship without working for peace: peace with the Earth, peace with one another, and peace among religions. I think the ecumenical spring is already on the way, not only in dealing with our

internal ecumenical problems but also in a willingness to look at a broader common agenda. We said we would walk, work, and pray together. The fact that we cannot yet celebrate the eucharist together does not mean there are no signs of spring, and hopefully, we can find ways to express this eucharistic fellowship together one day. But if we are using the image of the seasons, then we need to talk about harvesting the fruits.

One of the fruits is our shared concern for the climate and the world, something that we manifest together because we believe in God the creator and our accountability to God, and in our common care for the common home we inhabit together. We have also seen fruits in terms of interfaith issues, which touch on some of the theological issues more than we might think and in strong and significant statements about baptism, our Christian faith, and how we confess it and practise it. I remember just how strong the Roman Catholic participation was at the Conference for World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha in 2018. There is a cross-fertilization of different movements, not only of the classical Protestant churches but also of Pentecostal churches and others together with the Catholic Church. So I see many signs of spring.

### **And what role do you see being played by Orthodox member churches?**

The WCC is an extensive fellowship, and the Orthodox churches have a firm commitment to be there as members. Still, they have also struggled among themselves about how to deal with this ecumenical movement. The Holy and Great Council in 2016 was a significant ecumenical event, where the Orthodox Church expressed its commitment to the broader ecumenical fellowship. In my many visits to Orthodox churches, I affirmed that they are significant members of the WCC, and we need their contribution to the whole fellowship.

### **The assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022 falls in the same year as the 20th anniversary of the presentation of the report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches, which introduced the consensus approach to decision making. At the time, there were many questions about what the report's proposals would mean for the WCC. How do you see the situation now?**

I think it is also important to remember that in the time since Busan, we have also marked the 20th anniversary of the Common Understanding and Vision (CUV) document of the WCC. This concluded very strongly that we needed to strengthen the dimension of the WCC being a "fellowship of churches." This is part of the response to the question as to how we relate to one another as churches with our own genuine and different identities. And therefore, the whole practice of consensus procedures tries to show respect to our identity of being churches together so that no church or church family feels that they are losing.

This marked a change in the approach in the WCC. In many cases, Orthodox participants felt reassured by the consensus procedure. The way they are now represented does not make them think they had to fight for every decision and vote because it is not majority voting as before. The processes leading to consensus-based decisions made them more feel at home and comfortable in the fellowship. I remember that one of the Orthodox architects of the consensus procedure said it is now possible to discuss all the difficult questions with openness because the discussion doesn't immediately lead to a vote. I felt that implementing this approach was part of my task in the light of the CUV vision that we are a fellowship of churches.

In many cases, I did not feel that our prophetic witness was weaker but stronger, definitely stronger. On the issue of climate change, for example, it is possible to say that the whole of the fellowship supports the approach of the WCC. On the other hand, there have been some issues

where finding a strong common expression has been challenging. We have seen this in discussions about human sexuality and related issues and some issues with a specific political connotation.

However, it's important to realize that the practice of consensus does not mean that we have to agree about everything. Consensus gives space for all without the pressure of having to make decisions. There is also a consensus to disagree relevant for a fellowship like ours, a consensus in which we listen to one another and give one another space. The challenge now is to avoid this consensus procedure becoming too focused on avoiding disagreements; that was not its purpose.

**One of the most difficult issues for the ecumenical fellowship to deal with has been the issue of human sexuality. To what extent do you think the churches and the fellowship have been able to try and begin to address this issue in the spirit of mutual accountability?**

My feeling is that the discussions in the recent assemblies have at least opened up a common understanding that we need to have spaces where we can talk about these issues. Suppose we don't facilitate the proper format for such a discussion or find space in the council for this discussion. In that case, it will negatively influence many other issues without us really acknowledging it's there.

There is also a greater understanding that these questions do not simply disappear if we say that we don't agree on what human beings are or what happens in the human family. So I think there has been a growing sense of acknowledging that we have to find ways to talk about these issues, even if we have different understandings or opinions on what is possible, for example, about same-sex relationships and marriages and so on.

However, we also need to recognize that human sexuality has many other dimensions, such as violence related to sexuality, and how we as Christian families, and families in the church fellowship, help the next generation to find a proper way of dealing with one another, as men and women as partners? It is not only about homosexuality.

I was disappointed that some strong voices said this discussion should not be on the agenda. Many more were willing to say that we need to have a safe space to talk. This doesn't mean that there have to be common decisions, but at least we can talk. The working group on human sexuality did a very good job, I think, bringing together many perspectives and many different opinions. It was a real conversation, not only discussing sexuality as an issue but also in discussing how we relate to one another. I think that we need to be human, but also Christian, in a way so that we accept one another as Christ received us. This does not mean we have to agree on everything or accept every solution, but we have to accept one another as human beings. I think the WCC has done a good job, but we need to continue the work that is not finished.

The other thing is that we don't always see how significant our work on HIV and AIDS has been. People have said very clearly that this has offered a space - a space that didn't exist in the past - to talk about some of the other issues related to human sexuality.

**It is sometimes said that the 20th century was the century of ecumenical cooperation, but the 21st century is the century of interfaith cooperation. How has the WCC been able to work not only among Christian churches but also with people of other faiths?**

I think the WCC has been recognized as a significant partner in interfaith dialogue, not only as a facilitator but also as representing a significant section of Christianity. We have also been shifting the focus from substantial theological discussions to discussions about how we can do things

together that have a positive effect, not only on the relationship between us as faith communities but also between peoples and nations. So there has been more of a peace agenda than before and maybe less of a specific theological agenda.

One of the most published documents in the past decade has been the short paper on “Christian Witness in a Multireligious World,” a joint project with the Vatican and the World Evangelical Alliance. It really was the broad Christian family stating that we have to relate to people of other faiths and do it in a Christian way.

People throughout the world live more or less closely with people of other faiths. Monocultural Western societies have over the years developed to become more multireligious, multicultural, multi-ethnic realities. And many, many churches in the world live as minorities, and for them, such dialogue is an issue of survival.

Regrettably, religion has increasingly become a problem in the political realities of the world. And then, we come to the issue of religion and violence and how to avoid this connection. One of our challenges is finding the right way to challenge those who use religion to promote intolerance, whether these are Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. We as Christians also have to look to see ourselves not only as victims of such violence but also to our historical role connected to wars of colonization and occupation and the Western activity in the name of this doctrine of discovery, which is a doctrine of domination. Changing that approach at decolonization was one of the most robust struggles in history, but we have realized that the job is not finished.

**At the beginning of the 1960s, with the Second Vatican Council and the entry of the Orthodox churches into the WCC, the vision of a more comprehensive reunification of Christendom seemed to be within grasp. Do you see this still as a goal? And what remains to be done to move beyond organizational unity to this kind of grand unification of Christendom?**

It is still a goal. But how do we define the scope? Today things are happening that back then, people could only dream might happen. Today, for example, it is natural that we can work with the pope on issues that we have in common. We should not give up the vision and the goal because we have not yet got there. We also need to acknowledge that something has been achieved and that we are in a different place now. The approach of the pilgrimage has helped us to make clear that we cannot focus on a single method: we cannot have only an institutional approach to our unity; we cannot have only a theological approach; we cannot have only the approach of prophetic witness; and we cannot have only a spiritual and personal approach. This unity has many dimensions corresponding to the double nature of unity as a gift and unity as a task. It will be coloured by our many gifts and efforts, but most of all by Christ’s love.

## **The Heart of our Fellowship is our Spirituality**

Interview with the Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, acting general secretary of the World Council of Churches from April 2020.

*The Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca was appointed acting general secretary of the World Council of Churches, beginning 1 April 2020, following the election of the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit as the presiding bishop of the Church of Norway, and pending the election of a successor. He has served the WCC since 1994 as executive secretary for Orthodox Studies and Relationship in Mission, professor for missiology at and director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, and as deputy general secretary with responsibility for ecumenical education and formation.*

**As WCC acting general secretary, you are the first Orthodox theologian to serve the WCC in this position of leadership. As an Orthodox theologian, do you think you have a particular contribution to make?**

Indeed, I am an Orthodox theologian and priest, with my roots in the Orthodox Church of Romania. I believe that one of the many gifts of the Orthodox tradition to the whole ecumenical movement is its deep spirituality, its engagement with Trinitarian theology, its emphasis on the recapitulation of all in Christ, and the transformation of human beings and the whole cosmos by the power and the work of the Holy Spirit. This has been important throughout my work with the World Council of Churches - whether in the mission team as executive secretary for Orthodox studies and relationship in mission, as a professor of missiology at and then director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, or as deputy general secretary with responsibility for ecumenical education and formation.

Of course, I wasn't appointed to this position because I am Orthodox. Still, as acting general secretary, the language of spirituality has been very important in my work, in speaking with other people, whether they are Christians or belong to other faiths, and even with the international organizations with whom we work. I'm not speaking from a confessional standpoint, because the Early Church sources I have shared and based myself upon in elaborating my discourse on faith are not confessional. Rather, they belong equally to all Christians, and I have noticed that using the language of spirituality that was central to early Christianity, Roman Catholics and Evangelicals and Pentecostals come closer to us, who belong to the fellowship of the WCC, and we were able to speak a common spiritual language in referring to many of the challenges of our times.

This spiritual dimension has been particularly important over the past two years, as the world has experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the requests that we have received from member churches have been for spiritual resources, biblical resources, or worship resources. It has been important that we have been able to offer an affirmation of our hope and trust in God, even amid our vulnerability.

I've realized that people have recognized the spiritual language in WCC statements and speeches, a language that people in the churches can identify with but which is also recognized by people in other faith communities. Despite our different faith identities, when we speak a spiritual language and speak to one another as people of faith, we discover that we have something in common that brings us closer. In the past, we said the WCC was a faith-based organization. Now, I would describe the WCC as a spiritual-based organization. The heart of our fellowship is the ecumenical spirituality we share, as the flame that fuels our drive for justice and sparks our work for peace. This spiritually inspired work of the WCC has a much broader reach, however. It aims to achieve the unity of Christians and of all creation and overcome divisions to serve all humanity in its quest for justice and peace.



**What have been the main challenges facing the World Council of Churches since you became acting general secretary?**

I took office as acting general secretary in April 2020 as the world was experiencing the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the past two years have been dominated by the pandemic and its consequences - its consequences for people, for the human family, and for our tasks and mission as a World Council of Churches. The pandemic has reached all the regions of our planet.

What we have learned from this pandemic has been our shared vulnerability and shared fate as one humanity. We feel more keenly the fragility of human life, indeed, of all life on this planet. However, it has not only reinforced the experience of our shared vulnerability but also our fundamental community as human beings, our solidarity across divides and borders, and our capacity for empathy, understanding, and even sacrifice. Fundamentally, I think, we have learned the real importance of our work as the WCC, not in spite of our faith identity but because of it. Our identity as a global Christian fellowship has enabled us to address this crisis in its deeper cultural and spiritual dimensions, to break barriers and build bridges, and to work relationally with one another. With our long experience in health and healing, we rapidly assembled a Ministry Support Team to field the many pastoral questions and concerns that have arisen in local and regional settings. The team of nine resource people, with expertise in different programmatic areas, offered support on how churches could discern their roles during the coronavirus pandemic, how they could adapt as faith communities, and how they could connect and share.

As a staff team, however, we could not meet in person; we could not see each other face to face – neither our member churches nor even colleagues. Given that staff travel and conferences were suddenly out of the question, most of our work had to be organized online. We shared stories from the fellowship, reported on COVID-related initiatives, and highlighted promising practices among churches responding to COVID-19.

It took some time to get used to online meetings. Still, very soon, we discovered that what appeared to be a barrier became a blessing, in the sense that through the help of new technology we could even strengthen our relationship with our member churches and strengthen further the community of our colleagues. Let me give some examples. We never imagined it would be possible to organize the Pilgrim Team Visits for the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace online. Not only was it possible, but in some ways, they had more impact and participation online, even if it would have been good for them to happen in person.

Another example is our prayer life. We might have said previously that if we cannot gather together in person as a staff community, then it is not prayer. But we realized that in using the new technology for our morning prayers, it is not only the Geneva community praying together but also people from the whole world. The publication of daily morning prayers and weekly prayer texts contributed by members of the fellowship, widely shared in social media and beyond, has made the WCC's identity as a fellowship united in prayer and service more visible.

At the same time, digital innovations have also enabled the WCC's many programmes to work together virtually with their key constituencies. The result has been a wealth of webcasts, podcasts, blog posts, and webinars covering the whole spectrum of the WCC's activities and programmes - on social justice, human rights, racial and gender equality, violence against women and children, good governance, as well as interreligious dialogue and on issues of faith and order.

So we have received God's blessings in the challenges that we faced because we have discovered new ways of strengthening our fellowship and our common faith.

**Of course, the WCC has a wide range of partners, from the Roman Catholic Church to representatives of other faiths and organizations such as the United Nations and its agencies. What have been the main areas of cooperation in your time as acting general secretary?**

We have had very good relations with the United Nations and its agencies, and cooperation has continued even though we could often not meet face to face because of the pandemic. We continue to work with UNICEF to support children's rights. Our cooperation with the World Health Organization has become even more important because of the pandemic. We have realized that we will never be able to overcome the pandemic unless most people in the world are vaccinated. Yet there is so much inequality in how the vaccines are being distributed. So the pandemic brought us face to face again with how much the world is divided.

The WCC executive committee has supported the efforts of the WHO by appealing for the sharing of technology and know-how to enable manufacturers in countries in the global South to produce vaccines for their people and others. In March 2021, for example, I joined an online "High-Level Dialogue on Multi-religious Response to COVID-19 Vaccine" with WHO director general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, as well as leaders from other religious groups. Later in the year, I took part in the G20 Interfaith Forum in Bologna in September 2021, with the theme "A Time to Heal."

I particularly want to highlight the publication by the WCC and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue soon after I took office of a document calling for interreligious solidarity in the service of a wounded world. This was followed in December 2020 by a joint initiative with the World Jewish Congress, where we jointly invited religious leaders of all traditions and places to reflect on and engage the ethical issues related to global vaccine distribution.

We have also continued our work with our partners on the climate crisis and threats to the environment. In October 2021, I joined Pope Francis and other religious leaders in Rome to issue a joint appeal in advance of the UN COP26 conference on climate change, where I underlined that the affirmation of one humanity and the value of human dignity within and with creation is at the heart of the aspirations of the WCC.

The WCC has a long-standing relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, and in December 2021, I was able to visit Pope Francis and the Vatican in Rome. What struck me was how much I was received as a member of the family. I shared some theological and spiritual perspectives on the theme of our 11th Assembly, pointing to the love of God in Christ that is inclusive and looks to the reconciliation and unity of all creation. Then Pope Francis shared his views on the theme. When we spoke about reconciliation, about walking together, working, witnessing together, we spoke the same language. I have had meetings with evangelical and Pentecostal churches, some of which are not members of the WCC but of the Global Christian Forum. I have been impressed by how they are getting closer to the WCC and how much we share a spiritual language. I recently gave a presentation on Orthodox understanding of mission, and a Pentecostal said to me afterwards: "We have been trying hard to develop a Pentecostal missiology but were not aware that a Holy-Spirit-centred missiology has already been present for 2000 years in the Orthodox Church." We may think we are different because we don't know one another, but when we gather together and speak with one another, we discover we share the common roots of our faith, and

this is why we talk about walking together and being pilgrims on the way. Despite our differences, we know that we have the common source of our faith.

**One of the specific areas in which you work is representing the WCC in the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity. What do you see as the contribution the WCC brings to the Higher Committee, and what does the Higher Committee bring to the work of the WCC?**

The Higher Committee of Human Fraternity was founded following the signing in February 2019 of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb. Why is this important? Because it brings together representatives from the three Abrahamic faiths and personalities from the secular world. Its whole basis is that we share one humanity. We are all God's children. We come from one family, and we are sisters and brothers despite our differences. In February 2022, I travelled to Dubai and Abu Dhabi to inaugurate the Abrahamic Family House, which consists of a mosque, church, synagogue, and educational centre, to symbolize the need for mutual understanding and peace among people of faith and goodwill.

**And in terms of the WCC programmes, what would you see as the key developments?**

I've already mentioned the creativity of our programme staff in finding new ways to continue their programmes through new technology, webinars and online meetings, but there are two areas in particular that I would like to mention.

The first is the issue of racism. Racism is a sin; it's blasphemy; it denies human dignity and creates divisions in the human family. If we are one in Christ, then we must repudiate racism. The world has become much more aware of this with the Black Lives Matter movement. For us, it is a matter of faith. The WCC had already begun discussing, before my appointment, a new programme on racism to start after the assembly, but the pandemic made many existing inequalities more visible, particularly the sin of racism. We realized that we could not wait because, in Christ, every life matters. We are aware of the experiences of people of African descent, indigenous peoples, people of Asian descent, the Roma people, the Dalit people, and many other groups. It should be a priority for each of us to engage the churches in overcoming racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia. So in January 2021, we established a new position and programme to overcome racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia.

The second area is that of our work in the Holy Land. The WCC has had several activities in the Holy Land - the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), and the Jerusalem Office, which touch on the relationship with the churches in the Holy Land. We started the activities at the request of the churches, but over time they became more distant from the programmes or were not even aware of them. So we approached the churches and proposed a restructuring so that these three activities that were running parallel to each other could be brought together under one umbrella – each would have its own reference group and activities, but there would be greater coordination so that each activity would know what was being done by the others, and could see how they could strengthen each other.

I was very happy that all heads of the churches in the Holy Land came together at the meeting we organized to discuss the WCC's involvement in the Holy Land and how the WCC can accompany them in their witness in that particular context. Now, the programme in the Holy Land is a WCC programme but one that is owned by the churches there. My hope is that this programme will be

strengthened, that we have better cooperation, better understanding, and that our Christian communities will feel that they are not left alone. They will be accompanied by other sisters and brothers from all over the world. The other issue involves our Jewish partners. We have to be honest and to speak on behalf of suffering humanity, whether we are talking about Palestinians or Jews, Christians or Muslims. The WCC has to affirm the values of human dignity for all. And this is what we are doing. We are pro-human dignity and pro-human rights for everybody.

And of course, not least given my personal history in this area of work, I want to highlight the 100th anniversary of the International Missionary Council that we celebrated in 2021. The founding of the International Missionary Council was an important milestone in the history of the ecumenical movement in the 20th century, and we rejoice that this area of work is now fully part of the work of the WCC.

Beyond these specific areas, I also want to underline the importance of involving the creative potential of youth in the WCC. It is an area of our work that is very close to my heart, and I am very happy that despite the pandemic, we have been able to continue the programmes of ecumenical studies at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, with students coming from around the world, as well as expanding possibilities for ecumenical education and formation through online courses offering opportunities for engagement globally.

Bossey has been a living example that the key to change and transformation in our lives, openness to dialogue, tolerance and cooperation and peaceful cohabitation with all those who share the same human values, whatever their faith or philosophical differences, remains education and formation. My heart always rejoices when I hear that one or another former Bossey student has been appointed to an important key leadership position in their church; or when we receive requests from churches to accept for a course of formation people that are about to be appointed to leadership position. Bossey stands as an icon of hope for the ecumenical movement.

**Now to turn from the programmatic work of the WCC to some of the organizational issues. Anybody visiting the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva will see a huge building project around the offices of the WCC known as the Green Village. What is the importance of the Green Village to the WCC?**

Green Village is the new development concept for the property on which the Ecumenical Centre now stands: it will have a renovated Ecumenical Centre, as well as new office space for commercial and civil society organizations, including the WCC, its sister organizations and tenants, and residential space. Construction began in 2019. This is a great project that should bring financial stability to the WCC in the future. But it is more than simply a building project. The whole project is based on the concept of sustainability and ecological awareness. For the buildings now under construction, energy for heating and cooling will be geothermal. Solar panels on the roofs will be connected to the main electricity grid and produce electricity for the Green Village buildings. The whole concept is based on the values of our being together, so that people in the different buildings can communicate with each other. The Promenade of Peace will run through the Green Village from Geneva as a symbol of dialogue and understanding. So, the whole concept of the Green Village is based on respecting the planet and trying to apply our values on care for creation.

**And how is the current financial situation of the council, and looking to the future, what are the main challenges?**

Given the pandemic, we have been told by some of our donors to be prepared that they may reduce their funding, not because they do not see the value of the WCC, but because they

themselves have less income from their members. So, we expect that we will have less funds in the future than in the past, but I have also learned in my more than 20 years working for the WCC that we can maintain the quality of our work, manage our finances, and be more focused on certain priorities. We are aware that certain things can be delegated to others, while the WCC maintains the focus on the whole vision and direction of the ecumenical movement.

**Looking to the WCC's 11th Assembly, the theme is "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." How does the theme speak to the situation of the world today? Do you have particular insights to offer as an Orthodox theologian?**

The very theme of the assembly is based on a Pauline text (2 Cor. 5:14). When Paul speaks about the love of Christ, he speaks about the love of God manifested in Christ through incarnation. And the reason for the incarnation was to bring the whole cosmos, humanity and the whole of creation into unity. So, the love of Christ is the love of God manifested in Christ for the unity of Christians, but also for the unity of humanity and of the whole creation.

Together with the climate emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a strong and brutal reminder that human beings belong to creation and have been given the mandate to care for it. As I have already mentioned, the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and exposed still further existing structural injustice. The assembly needs to address this situation and speak to the world in clear and direct ways that all may understand. It cannot gloss over the deep, multifaceted civilizational crisis that faces the world. The assembly has the chance to explore how Christ's love opens a horizon of hope. This biblical and theological approach also obliges us to enter into dialogue with people of other faiths and people who have no faith but the same values as us because they are also members of the same human family assumed in the incarnation.

## Chapter One: Strengthening the Fellowship

*“The goal of visible unity is clear. We continue to learn on the way from each other what it entails to be this fellowship committed to unity in faith and common witness to the world, how Christian unity and the unity of humankind and all creation are intertwined.”*

—**Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca**, WCC acting general secretary since May 2020

In the years since the WCC 10th Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2013, the WCC fellowship has grown stronger through both theological and strategic convergence. WCC member churches have deepened their sense of needing one another and of being called by Christ to be in unity. More than simply a state of harmony among church bodies, true unity is exhibited in what WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit termed “the simple truth of one human family.”

### ***Koinonia*: a spirit of deep fellowship**

For the first time in its history, the Faith and Order Commission met in China, at the Nanjing Theological Seminary, which offered a glimpse into the life of a “post-denominational church.”

The commission met in June 2019 in what was the third major WCC meeting held in China between 2016 and 2019. Rev. Wu Wei, president of the China Christian Council, which has 38 million members, extended a sincere welcome to the commission. “The WCC is the only international church organization that China Christian Council takes part as a member,” reflected Wu. “It is to our great delight that we have this opportunity of hosting the Faith and Order Commission meeting, not only because of the bond with the WCC for decades, but also because of the belief that the explorations on the nature of the church done by this commission are inspiring and illuminating to our pursuit of the church unity in China.” Eighteen months later, in January and February 2021, the commission experienced another innovation by meeting online for the first time.

*“We celebrate a long common pilgrimage on the path to unity, Christian witness, and the commitment to justice, peace, and the preservation of creation.”*

— **Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew**, offering a homily during a service celebrating the WCC’s 70th Anniversary, 17 June 2018, at St Pierre, Geneva’s historic Protestant cathedral

What can we say together about the Church of Christ and the common witness and the moral teaching of the churches in today’s world so that they may grow in fellowship?

The WCC Faith and Order Commission is a study commission constituted by official representatives of churches belonging to the main historical streams of Christianity, including the Roman Catholic Church. The Commission is a unique multilateral, global forum for theological work in the service of communion among churches.

The main fruits of the Commission’s work since the 2013 Busan assembly come from its three study groups: on the call to the churches to be together in a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace; on the common understanding of the Church; and on disagreements concerning the teaching of the churches on moral issues.

The first study group drew on the wealth of Christian traditions in order to help the churches to witness together on justice and peace in today’s world. It published *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* in 2019, and in 2021, *Love and Witness: Proclaiming the Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ in a Religiously Plural World*; and *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for Creation*.

The second study group, on the common understanding of the Church analyzed nearly 80 responses to the 2013 document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV), most of them by churches, national or local councils of churches, and ecumenical organizations. The responses were published in 2021 in two volumes – *Churches Respond to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. In a third volume, members of the Commission revisited divisive issues in light of the responses to TCTCV. “Joy to the World”, a message from the Commission to the churches, summarized the ecumenical significance of the responses. This study group also started consultations on the common understanding of the Church with churches which have not been traditionally involved in ecumenical conversations.

The third study group, concentrating on moral discernment, acknowledges that churches respond differently to ethical questions, risking either divisions within themselves or preventing them from witnessing with one voice. Some questions the group commonly explores include: How is it that ethical responses differ? Why do some ethical topics endanger or prevent unity while others do not?

“The Faith and Order Commission intends to help the churches by investigating which sources and factors play a role in the process that they engage in when discerning ethical questions,” explained Prof. Dr Myriam Wijlens (Erfurt University, Germany), one of the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church on the Commission.

The third study group published three volumes on Churches and Moral Discernment in 2021: *Learning from Traditions*; *Learning from History*; and the final report, *Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia*.

Scholars and students now have access online to the Faith and Order Papers Digital Edition, an authoritative digital collection more than 300 publications produced by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and its predecessor movement from 1910 to the present day, a unique collection that documents not only progress in modern ecumenical theology but also the circumstances in which this progress has taken place.

At the direction of the Busan assembly, and inspired by the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the WCC has also been preparing a document on human sexuality entitled “Conversations on the Pilgrim Way,” to help churches become “safe spaces” for understanding and dealing with the range of issues around human sexuality and the experiences of their members. As the Busan assembly noted, “Controversial issues have their place within that safe space on the common agenda, remembering that tolerance is not enough, but the baseline is love and mutual respect.”

### **Embracing all Christians**

The WCC has seen unprecedented outreach and warm relations with Roman Catholics, evangelicals, Pentecostals, and other Christian bodies. Among many visitors to the WCC were Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Pope Francis; the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, Patriarch Abune Matthias of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Aladura Patriarch Dr Rufus Okikiola Ositelu of Nigeria, and Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chair of the Russian Orthodox Church Department of External Church Relations.

### **A dynamic unity**

*“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.”*

—**The Arusha Call to Discipleship**

The WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism has played a significant role in strengthening the WCC fellowship. The WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in March 2018 in Arusha, Tanzania - the largest conference of its kind since 1910 - yielded inspiration and spiritual stimulation that are still rippling through the world today. The mission conference cemented global commitment to a whole new way and style of seeing mission as from the margins, a matter of learning from, rather than instructing, those with whom Christian missions interact or serve.

The mission conference unanimously adopted two documents, “The Arusha Conference Report” and “The Arusha Call to Discipleship.” Both of these have been translated into a variety of languages. The report of the Arusha conference, *Moving in the Spirit*, was launched in the meeting of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in Helsinki, Finland, in 2019.

The Arusha Call to Discipleship has been described as exhilarating, transformative, and challenging to the point of discomfort for some, reflecting mission as a root of the ecumenical movement. The conference itself, said WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, allowed people to share vastly different dimensions of spirituality. “I would even say we all are sharing the different dimensions of being the church: What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ today in the many contexts of the world?”

The 2019 CWME meeting in Helsinki, the first one after the Arusha conference, restructured the commission’s working groups according to the ethos and outcome of the conference. Since mission is not only praxis, but is also theology, the Commission set up a new working group called “Theology for Mission.” This aimed especially at building theological bridges between the Arusha conference and the clearly missiological theme of the WCC assembly in 2022. The group on evangelism was renamed the working group on “Transforming Discipleship,” following the emphasis of the Arusha mission conference and discipleship being an ongoing theme in world Christianity, from the Roman Catholic Church to the World Evangelical Alliance. The working group on “Mission from the Margins” has continued its work seeing mission from the margins and giving voice and visibility for those who are at the margins, excluded by the “centre.” At an online Commission meeting in March 2021, the Transforming Discipleship working group presented a study paper “Converting Discipleship: Dissidence and Metanoia,” while the Mission from the Margins working group presented its study paper “Reimagining Mission from the Margins.” The Commission also approved plans to commemorate the 2022 centenary of the founding of the International Missionary Council.

### **Regional ecumenical bodies**

*“The ecumenical movement is one that it is rooted in the churches and that is wider than the ecumenical bodies they represent.”*

#### **—Guiding Principles for Relationships and Cooperation between the WCC and the Regional Ecumenical Organizations**

Leaders of regional and various national ecumenical organizations convened in July 2019 for a meeting at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute. It included the All Africa Conference of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia, Caribbean Conference of Churches, Conference of European Churches, Canadian Council of Churches, Middle East Council of Churches, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Pacific Conference of Churches.

Strengthening the WCC fellowship means encouraging and facilitating the work of regional ecumenical bodies. Regional ecumenical bodies share news with each other, and identify common



concerns, such as peace in the Middle East, climate justice, racism, and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. They continue to plan opportunities for cooperation and joint action - an outcome of the WCC's efforts to facilitate closer collaboration.

### **Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace**

*“Many women and children are victims of violence, inequality and trafficking as are some men. There are those who are marginalised and excluded.”*

—Unity Statement, WCC 10th Assembly in Busan, 2013

The WCC fellowship is strengthened, systematically and organically, through the global, regional, and grassroots Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, initiated by the 10th Assembly in Busan and based around the methodology of “Celebrating the Gifts,” of God’s great gift of life, the beauty of creation and the unity of a reconciled diversity; “Visiting the Wounds” of violence and injustices; and “Transforming the Injustices.”

In the pilgrimage, churches have pursued unity and communion even as they engage in justice and peace action. It’s a collective journey of faith and transformation, in which the churches have answered Christ’s call to lift the poor and the oppressed.

The Commission on Faith and Order described the theological foundation of the pilgrimage in *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*. Inspired by this theological foundation, the pilgrimage has moved toward concrete action for the dignity of all human beings by standing against racism and gender-based violence, for example. In fact, in many ways, solidarity is the practical badge of Christian unity and fellowship.

Illustrative of the many activities initiated by churches inspired by the 10th Assembly’s call to pilgrimage is the annual weeklong pilgrimage of members of the Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa. It has drawn more than 300 people, the oldest being 92. Under the banner, “Justice and only justice shall you pursue” (Deut. 16:20), members have marched, visited, and prayed their way through Lesotho and into neighbouring South Africa, aiming “to feel and share the pain of people who are forced to leave their homes due to war, political instability or economic hardship, and violence,” say the organizers.

The WCC has also facilitated many dialogues and solidarity visits that have examined - in candid and even painful ways - the global manifestations of racism. One example is a webinar coordinated by the WCC, where the Rev. Seth Wispelwey, interim pastor at Rincon Congregational United Church of Christ in Tucson, Arizona (USA), reflected on the “national DNA” of the USA, stating: “White supremacy and whiteness as an ideology have been baked into the national DNA of the United States of America since its inception as a nation state, and white supremacy intersects with three other dominant spiritualities that comprise our national religion: patriarchy, militarism, and consumer capitalism. Those all infuse our national DNA.”

From a deepening spirit of *koinonia* among WCC member churches in Japan, to the Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity (YATRA) programme having its largest global participation ever, the WCC has expanded both the inclusivity and depth of the pilgrimage. As Bishop Renta Nishihara, a WCC central committee member from Japan, said: “I would like to emphasize that Japanese ecumenism is rooted in the fields of social issues.”

The pilgrimage has continued the WCC’s passion for advocacy through efforts such as the Thursdays in Black campaign for a world free from rape and violence. “The Thursdays in Black campaign is a show of solidarity with partner churches and our global ecumenical family,” said

Carlos Peña, vice-president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and a member of the WCC central committee. At an anniversary celebration in 2018 in Jamaica for the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–1998), Dr Agnes Abuom, moderator of the WCC central committee, spoke of the need to reflect critically and continually about churches, solidarity, women, and justice: “What we will be discussing this week – violence against women; full and creative participation of women in the life of the church; economic crisis, racism and xenophobia and their impacts on women – these issues were raised 20 years ago at the end of the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women.”

The WCC ECHOS Commission on Youth, during a weeklong meeting in Korea in 2019 of 80 young people from all over the world, lived the theme “Walking with Peace, Reclaiming Hope” as they walked in solidarity along the Demilitarized Zone and other sites to learn more about peace, healing, and reconciliation in Korea.

As part of the Pilgrimage, Pilgrim Team Visits have been organized to express solidarity with churches and people who live in contexts of violence, injustice, and oppression. Such Pilgrim Teams have walked alongside communities in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, Burundi, Japan, the Philippines, West Papua, the USA, and many other places. They have often heard stories of women who are facing sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence, and other injustices.

Lorena Rios, coordinator of religious affairs at the Ministry of Interior of Colombia, spoke on the impact that a Pilgrim Team Visit had in her country: “As a woman of faith, I want to acknowledge the support we have had from the World Council of Churches, which has been key in the strategic moments for the achievement of the visibility and impact of the religious sector in my country. Our peace process, although it is a new paradigm for the achievement of lasting peace, is first of all a testimony of how the international community has been committed and involved to accompany us in achieving it.”

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has also reached out to children. The “Churches Commitment to Children” is an open invitation to WCC member churches and partners to address the needs of children as an integral part of the ecumenical commitment to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

## Chapter Two: Public Witness and Diakonia

*“I was born in war, grew up in war, and became a mom and grandma in war.”*

These striking words greeted the World Council of Churches pilgrims visiting Juba, the South Sudan capital, in May 2018.

From calling for peace in South Sudan, the world’s most recently independent sovereign state with widespread recognition, to demanding an alternative global financial architecture and pursuing the re-unification of the Korean Peninsula, the World Council of Churches’ strong prophetic voice has resonated worldwide in its public witness and *diakonia*.

Public witness means the WCC and its member churches witnessing together for peace, building peace, and advocating for justice in several countries. It has accompanied the member churches and ecumenical partners in advocating for human dignity and rights, democracy, as well as economic, ecological, gender and social justice at global, regional, and national levels.

The WCC’s public witness has unfolded alongside *diakonia* or Christian service. Such service has been visible in the calls for a sustainable future, the tackling of climate change, and support for an economy that offers life. Other engagements have included securing water rights, empowerment of women, and lifting up the lives of youth.

The *diakonia* work has found a basis and support in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, a call that the WCC issued in 2013, recognizing the need to hold on to hope in spite of global crises. The council’s theological and unity work and the vast peace, justice, and *diakonia* work are joined in the pilgrimage.

While *diakonia* has been a visible and active image of the WCC since its inception, since 2014 considerable efforts have been directed at reframing the work to bond the traditional theological language with the more secular one of the civil societies and NGOs. The aim has been to create mutual trust and also to facilitate partnerships between the churches’ wide grassroots networks and secular agencies.

This work has been accomplished through joint efforts of the WCC, its member churches, regional ecumenical organizations, development partners, and UN agencies.

### **Intensified focus, worldwide resonance**

The main focus countries for recent WCC action and advocacy have been the Middle East, South Sudan, Syria, the Korean Peninsula, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Colombia. The countries were selected by WCC member churches and partner organizations at the 10th Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2013 due to their circumstances of war, conflict and violence, or abuse and exploitation.

**South Sudan** has been trapped in deadly conflict since December 2013, barely two years after its independence in 2011. The conflict has triggered an enormous humanitarian crisis, internal displacement, and refugees.

WCC engagement in Sudan dates back to 1972, when it brokered the Addis Ababa Accord together with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). The pact ended the first Sudanese war, fought from 1955 to 1972. A second civil war broke out in 1983; and when it ended in 2005, after 21 years and following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), more than 2 million

people had died. A referendum in 2011 voted for secession, with independence occurring on 9 July 2011.

With the latest conflict, the WCC and its partners have continued in their accompaniment. Among other actions, it has gathered the country's church leaders for consultative meetings and supported their work for justice and peace.

One such meeting occurred 14-15 April 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, after which the church leaders pledged to initiate a broad-based peace advocacy.

In May 2018, a WCC Pilgrim Team visited South Sudan under the theme, "African Women of Faith and Gender Justice." The team affirmed gender equality as a foundation for a peaceful and sustainable world.

Speaking of their experiences, members of the team said they had witnessed the South Sudanese churches working together to protect the dignity of citizens caught in the cycle of civil wars.

In a letter to the South Sudan Council of Churches and member churches in South Sudan, WCC general secretary Olav Fykse Tveit welcomed the establishment of a transitional unity government in South Sudan in February 2020 and warned that the destruction of South Sudan's infrastructure through long years of war, instability and corruption has left its people highly vulnerable to this new and unprecedented threat to public health, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As in South Sudan, *Korean* churches' ecumenical witness and prayers have been essential, inspiring new hope for the people on the Korean Peninsula.

Although military combat ended more than six decades ago, the North and South Korea, the USA, and China have never signed a peace treaty but have kept the region in a state of war-readiness, with military build-ups as well as stockpiling of nuclear weapons.

Against this background, the Busan assembly stressed that the women, men, and children's suffering of the effects of war contradicted God's will for the enjoyment of the fullness of life. It urged the global church fellowship and the international community to pursue a lasting peace for reconciliation and reunification of the people of Korea.

"We reject Cold War mentality in responses to the current situation on the Korean peninsula and seek liberation from fear of the other. In times of crisis, or even on the very brink of war, we believe that the only path to peace is the path of encounter and dialogue among people," the assembly stated.

The WCC first brought together Korean Christians and others from churches worldwide in 1984 at the Tozanso YMCA centre in Japan, to discuss divisions on the Korean peninsula. Organized by the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), the consultation enabled the Korean churches to openly discuss the issue of reunification.

Since then, visits by WCC general secretaries in 1999, 2009, and 2013 have reinforced the WCC's and its member churches' commitment to the search for peace and reunification of North and South Korea. This is one of the reasons why the WCC convened the 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013, which supported further efforts at peace and reunification.

Building on this history, the WCC gathered 58 church representatives and related organizations for a conference in Hong Kong SAR, China, in November 2016. The conference, hosted by the Hong Kong Council of Churches, sought to promote improved inter-Korean relations and to pursue peace in the peninsula.

A powerful witness to people's desire for peace and security was seen the WCC's call to employ the power of prayer for the cause of peace through the Advent 2017 campaign "A Light of Peace," a worldwide witness for reconciliation and reunification on the Korean Peninsula and a world free of nuclear weapons. Picking up on this initiative, the National Council of Churches in Korea brought Koreans together for prayers and songs of hope for peace in Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul and to pray, "God, grant us that our light shine where we are, so that we share the life and the hope you have given us."

Just a few days after the historic Panmunjom summit in April 2018 and the joint declaration to work for peace and reunification, the WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, led a six-person ecumenical delegation to Pyongyang in North Korea, to support the momentum for peace through meetings with state officials and representatives of the Korean Christian Federation.

An international ecumenical delegation comprised of representatives of the WCC and the World Communion of Reformed Churches, led by WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit and WCRC general secretary Rev. Dr Chris Ferguson, visited the North Korean capital of Pyongyang in May 2018, at the invitation of the Korean Christian Federation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Two months later, in June 2018, The Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification and Development Cooperation, involving church leaders from both the North and South of the Korean Peninsula, convened and issued a call to "Seek Peace and Pursue It." Convening online in January 2021, members and supporters of the forum recalled the initiatives undertaken during 2020 despite the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and reflected on the implications of a changing global context for efforts for peace

Following improved church relations, the National Council of Churches of Korea general secretary, Rev. Dr Lee Hong-Jung, and the WCC President for Asia, Rev. Dr Sang Chang, attended the 3rd Inter-Korean Summit in Pyongyang in September 2018. A round table for peace on the peninsula was held in Atlanta, Georgia (USA), in November 2018.

In November 2019, a delegation led by WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit met the prime minister of the Republic of Korea, Lee Nak-yeon. "We have a long history of supporting encounter and dialogue between Christians from both North and South Korea," Dr Tveit said, "and we are committed to doing more."

The following year, in 2020, Dr Tveit was then honoured with the Dongbaek Medal of the Order of Civil Merit of the Republic of Korea, for contributing to the development of the Republic of Korea through the efforts of peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula.

Working with the National Council of Churches in Korea, the WCC has invited churches everywhere to join in prayer campaigns for peace and denuclearization on the peninsula. In 2020, the NCCCK and WCC observed the lead-up to the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War, through a global prayer campaign from March to August, and the publication of a special collection of resources, *The Light of Peace: Churches in Solidarity with the Korean Peninsula*.

Following on the 2017 “A Light of Peace” prayer campaign the WCC with the NCK and WCC observed a global prayer campaign from March to August 2020 to mark the lead-up to the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War, and the publication of a special collection of resources, *The Light of Peace: Churches in Solidarity with the Korean Peninsula*.

In the first virtual Pilgrim Team Visit, in July 2020, a WCC Women of Faith Pilgrim Team visited South Korea under the theme, “The Korean War and Women’s Life—the Journey towards Peace and Reconciliation.” The team commemorated the 70th anniversary of the Korean War and encountered Korean women’s struggle in response to the long-term fallout of the unfinished war.

The main 2021 focus for the National Council of Churches in Korea was a Korea Peace Appeal Campaign aiming to collect one million signatures from the global ecumenical fellowship, and intended to continue until 27 July 2023, the 70th anniversary of the Korean Armistice Agreement.

The WCC and the WCRC member churches in South Korea remain at the centre of an ecumenical solidarity movement for peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

In the ***Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)***, armed conflict often passes as “Africa’s forgotten war.” Nearly 100 armed groups are involved in deadly conflict fuelled by mineral wealth. The conflict has killed thousands and displaced millions, and countless women and girls have suffered rape and other atrocities. The recent emergence of the Ebola epidemic has further complicated the situation.

In 2013 in Busan, WCC member churches identified DRC as yet another priority country, where the WCC needed to strengthen peacebuilding and interfaith witness.

Amid the increasing concern for DRC, the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the WCC general secretary, attended an ecumenical forum in the capital, Kinshasa, from 25 April to 2 May 2014. While there, he stressed that the time had come to move forward in the search for peace and justice in the country.

A series of events followed, with an informal ecumenical working group being formed in June. The forum carried out national consultations and collaboration on the electoral process, management of natural resources, gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS, human rights and humanitarian initiatives, and youth issues.

The Church of Christ in Congo and the Independent National Electoral Commission, working with the WCC and the AACC, organized a workshop in December 2014 in Kinshasa to strengthen democratic governance and the country’s electoral process. The workshop stimulated teamwork between churches and ecumenical organizations and raised awareness of electoral issues.

The WCC also convened a peace and security conference in Geneva on the DRC, during which the country’s church leaders highlighted the existing threats and challenges, especially the insecurity resulting from resource pillaging, corruption, and poverty.

In August 2018, the general secretary again visited DRC to meet with religious leaders and government officials, to express solidarity, and to pray for just peace. “This is a great and compelling life task: to protect our peace, to act in a way that enables us to be one—even though we are different,” he said in Kinshasa.

The following year the DRC's minister of human rights, Andre Lite Asebea, visited the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva to discuss the human rights situation in Congo with the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit.

In September 2020, after hearing about death threats in against Nobel laureate Dr Denis Mukwege, physician director of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo, the WCC in September 2020 urged UN officials to call upon the government to ensure the protection of the life of Mukwege.

In *Palestine and Israel*, the WCC's work has been intensive and extensive in the land of Jesus' birth and the cradle of the three Abrahamic religions. WCC support for the State of Israel dates from before the nation's founding in 1948, and it has also and always entailed commitments to justice for all, including the Palestinian peoples displaced in the lead-up to the declaration and those who, since 1967, are subject to Israeli occupation.

"From a Christian faith-based moral perspective," said the WCC's executive committee in November 2017, "a just peace for all in Palestine and Israel requires equal freedom, human rights and self-determination for the Palestinian people as well as for Israelis. All forms of violence should come to an end."

An important programme of the council in the quest for just peace in Israel and Palestine is its Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (WCC-EAPPI). Initiated in 2002 in response to an appeal from local church leaders, EAPPI is an international, ecumenical programme that recruits, trains, and fields about 30 observers (Ecumenical Accompaniers or EAs) in stints of three months. Supported by a team in Jerusalem, the EAs are dispatched to several Palestinian towns and villages to observe interaction between the Palestinian inhabitants, Israeli settlers, and the Israeli military, and to support long-term efforts to build peace between different communities. They systematically monitor human rights and accompany schoolchildren and others in safety in their daily lives.

Over the years, roughly 1800 EAs have served in the programme, many of whom remain involved and interested in working toward a just peace in Palestine and Israel long after their service.

Amid demographic and political changes, the WCC embarked on a thorough review of EAPPI in 2016, widely surveying its civil and religious constituencies and NGO and UN partners and rigorously assessing the programme to improve its activities and chart its future strategic direction.

Although the WCC has regularly been criticized in public and news circles for its advocacy and witness in Palestine and Israel, it has also been widely praised for its principled stance for nonviolence, social justice, and peace, and for its steadfast presence there.

"WCC has a special role in being the common prophetic voice for just peace, for convening partners, for accompaniment, for communication, for sharing information, and to mobilize and coordinate the involvement of churches worldwide for just peace in Palestine and Israel," affirmed the WCC's executive committee in 2017.

### **The WCC and the Human Rights Council**

Since Busan, the CCIA has accompanied churches and their partners for human rights in many countries to bring their concerns to the attention of the UN human rights system. An important forum has been the UN Human Rights Council, established in 2006, whose mission is to promote and protect human rights around the world.

The CCIA has run several human rights workshops around the world, and churches have been supported to prepare written and oral submissions to UN bodies outlining their concerns and recommendations, to advocate with governments, and to follow up in their own countries when recommendations for action are issued. The human rights issues which churches have raised have been very varied across the full spectrum of civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights.

In 2017, for example, the CCIA carried out a series of human rights workshops with both adults and children in several locations in Nigeria. The issues raised included concerns about the security situation in the country, restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, violence against women and children - particularly sexual violence and abuse, and socio-economic concerns affecting the right to education, health and to work. When Nigeria was reviewed by the Human Rights Council in 2018, a 15-year-old year girl briefed Government officials in Geneva about the concerns expressed by children through the workshops. Many Governments then raised her particular concerns when they spoke during the review of Nigeria.

Another of the WCC's important activities in the area is the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel (WWPPI), an annual observance during which member churches, faith-based communities, and civil society organizations around the world join together for a week of prayers, discussions, advocacy and other public, nonviolent actions in support of an end to the occupation and a just peace for all in Palestine and Israel.

In **Syria**, violence and turmoil have destroyed the lives of millions of people in the Middle Eastern country, the Busan assembly heard. The conflict started as part of the Arab Spring in 2011. It pits the Ba'athist Syrian Arab Republic led by President Bashar al-Assad and his allies, against various forces domestic and foreign.

In the violence, clergy and civilians suffered frequent abductions, with torture, massacres, and extrajudicial killings becoming a daily reality. The violence has displaced millions of individuals, families, and entire communities, while triggering an enormous humanitarian crisis.

With the deteriorating situation, the WCC and member churches have raised their voices against the violence and against attacks on Christian villages, while calling for justice and peace and increased international action.

In February 2015, the WCC condemned Islamic State (IS) attacks and abductions of Christians from the ancient Assyrian Church in Khabour in Hassake, Syria.

With increased airstrikes and bombardments trapping thousands of people in Aleppo in December 2016, the WCC demanded an immediate end to the military action.

In April 2017, the council condemned another attack on Khan Sheikhoun village in Idlib Province, which left at least 70 people dead, including 20 children.

The WCC also organized two meetings in 2017 (in June and October) in connection with the UN-facilitated Syrian peace talks in Geneva.

The council has been reiterating the call for immediate release of two archbishops, His Eminence Boulos (Yazigi), Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo and Alexandretta, and His Eminence Mor Youhanna Gregorios (Ibrahim), Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo in Syria, in captivity since April 2013.



After speaking with 4000 refugees in Syria and Northern Iraq, the WCC and Norwegian Church Aid in November 2016 issued a joint research report, *Protection Needs of Minorities from Syria and Iraq*, on the need for aid there to be appropriate to the lifeways and religious and cultural characteristics of the particular groups being served, as well as their safety from violence and discrimination. Particularly religious or ethnic minorities, but also women, children, the elderly, the sick, and victims of abuse, are some of the most vulnerable groups, made doubly so by the armed conflict in the region.

In April 2018, the WCC's general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, deplored that Syria and its people had been the victims of unremitting violence and brutality for nearly seven years and were facing "the greatest humanitarian tragedy since the Second World War."

"Pilgrimages are for people of faith to holy places. That might be places of great historical importance for our faith. However, places where sanctity of life, holy in the eyes of God, is under threat can also be holy places."

—**WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit**, in a speech at the launch of the International Centre for Interfaith Peace and Harmony in Kaduna Nigeria, on 19 June 2016.

In November 2019, WCC general secretary the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit warned that the escalating protests, accompanying violence, and increasing polarization in **Iraq** are of grave concern for all who cared for the country and its people. A series of workshops in Iraq, organized in December 2020 by the WCC in collaboration with the Norwegian Church Aid and involving education experts, representatives of government and of different ethnic groups, as well as Iraqi religious and community leaders, focused on the role of education in promoting social cohesion and sustainable peace.

**Nigeria** is also experiencing a deadly conflict. Boko Haram has waged an armed rebellion against the government since 2009, overrunning villages and towns. It has carried out suicide bombings, massacres, and abductions.

In April 2014 the extremist group kidnapped 276 girls from a government school in Chibok town in the Borno State, in the country's north. The kidnapping triggered international outrage, uniting the world in demanding the girls' release. It also brought onto the international stage the extremist violence in Africa's most populous nation.

The WCC responded, with the general secretary expressing the organization's "profound concern" at the abduction, while encouraging peaceful resolution of the underlying conflict. "Our concern is intensified in the face of increasing global sexual exploitation of girls and women, and the possibility that these abducted students may become victims of just such injustice and violence," general secretary Tveit said in a letter to President Goodluck Jonathan.

Christian-Muslim tensions have erupted several times in the country. The WCC has maintained close contact and worked closely with member churches in Nigeria. It has been concerned about religious violence and the freedom of religion and belief in the country.

Nigerian Christians and Muslims gathered in 2016 to open the International Centre for Inter-Faith Peace and Harmony (ICIPH).

The centre is located in Kaduna, where more than 20,000 people have died in various conflicts over the last three decades.

An initial intention was for ICIPH to establish a neutral information-collection and archive centre. While some steps have been taken in this direction, the work of ICIPH so far has focused mainly on a number of projects in reconciliation and peacebuilding. Various programmes run by ICIPH have involved many Muslim and Christian religious leaders and young people in Kaduna and Plateau states.

ICIPH staff regards its most fruitful work currently as its recruitment and training of ICIPH Peace Ambassadors. A number of meetings were held in 2017 and 2018 to build up a substantial network of young Muslim and Christian professionals committed to promoting peace and harmony in their communities and serving as channels of communication about developing tensions. ICIPH has also run a “Hands across the Divide” event for Muslim and Christian youth and “Catching Them Young” outreach events in a number of secondary schools, seeking to help pupils overcome communal tensions and developing “Peace Clubs” in these schools.

In November 2014, after the attack on the Grand Mosque in Kano, General Secretary Tveit stated in a strong condemnation that it was evil to attack people at a place of worship. He reminded parties that both Christians and Muslims were threatened by the extreme violence.

In 2016, the general secretary presided at the launch of the International Centre for Inter-Faith Peace and Harmony in Kaduna as part of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. He said the World Council of Churches was seeking a faith journey with other Christians and members of other faiths. The centre is a meeting place of Christians and Muslims and also documents interreligious violence.

In January 2018, the WCC hosted a public panel on "Christianity and Human Rights in Multi-Faith Nigeria," that included Nigeria's Aladura Patriarch Dr Rufus Okikiola Ositelu, which discussed the current challenges for Christianity in Nigeria and Africa and how churches can tackle human rights violations in a multi-faith context.

In January 2020, in a joint appeal to Nigerian president Muhammadu Buhari, the WCC and the Lutheran World Federation expressed grief at the continuing violence in Nigeria and urged the Nigerian government to better protect the people.

### **International Affairs**

In the WCC's work with its member churches, the cry of the victims of injustice worldwide has found a hearing through the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA).

The commission brings together a global team of 35 experts nominated from around the world by churches and regional ecumenical organizations. The church leaders, pastors, lay persons, and academics usually meet once a year.

The CCIA offers an ecumenical forum, information, and leadership on national and international problems facing WCC member churches, their agencies, and other ecumenical partners, especially in the area of public witness and *diakonia*.

Currently it convenes eight groups, on Africa, economic justice, human rights and freedom of religion or belief, the Middle East, nuclear disarmament, reform of international governance, religion and violence, and statelessness, refugees, and migration.

Among other key highlights, the commission engaged extensively in the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) throughout 2017. CCIA participated in the UN Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons in New York City. It also monitored the vote on the final draft treaty on 7 July 2017, in which 122 countries voted in favour of the treaty. It then entered into force on 22 January 2021, after 50 countries ratified it. The treaty establishes a comprehensive ban on the development, testing, production, stockpiling, stationing, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Another issue of concern has been the development and deployment of fully autonomous weapons systems, sometimes called “killer robots,” that use artificial intelligence to identify, select and execute attacks on individual targets without real-time control, decision-making and responsibility by human decision-makers.

The WCC joined Pax Christi Northern California and Soka Gakkai International in issuing a joint statement in February 2021 warning that “the surrender of life-and-death decisions to robots would represent a serious abdication of human responsibility for the content and consequences of one’s actions.”

In October 2017, the commission organized an ecumenical pre-conference and participated in the fifth Arctic Circle Assembly. More than 2000 participants attended the 13-15 October conference, intended to strengthen the international focus on the future of the Arctic. In June 2017, a CCIA-supported delegation travelled to Quito, Ecuador, to consult with the rebel forces of ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) on the WCC’s role in the peace process between the Colombian government and the group.

With the CCIA’s programme on refugees, many member churches in receiving countries are making great efforts to offer welcome and support to refugees and migrants. They are also helping to counter the atmosphere of fear and exclusion, racism and xenophobia that has become more prevalent in many wealthier countries of destination.

With the huge wave of migrants and refugees, especially from Africa and the Middle East, arriving in Europe, the churches have helped the migrants’ passage and integration into new societies. In January 2016 the WCC in collaboration with the UN organized a major, high-level gathering in Geneva of governments, United Nations agencies, church and faith groups, and civil society organizations to support and coordinate their efforts.

Churches in Sweden and Germany have provided support and hospitality, advocating for the human rights of migrants and refugees, as other countries find difficulties in accepting them.

Through the CCIA, the WCC has also been urging protection of the rights of the more than 12 million stateless people around the world. It has been urging governments to ensure that they get citizenship, access to health care, education, and employment. In October 2019, the WCC joined other organizations in signing a statement delivered to the UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, that urged immediate action on statelessness: “Once denied the right to a nationality, the stateless face wide-ranging human rights violations, including the right to education, healthcare, employment, property, inheritance, movement, participation, liberty and security of the person.”

A particular yet far-reaching initiative of the World Council of Churches is WCC-Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN). Based in Nairobi, the programme has concentrated on mainstreaming and integrating persons with disabilities into the spiritual and social life of the churches. With the publication in 2016 of *The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and for All*, EDAN has further deepened its theological analysis

to encompass not just matters of inclusive justice for the disabled within the churches but also to reframe and re-envision the whole concept of being human and its concomitant realities of disability, including giftedness, vulnerability, and healing.

In July 2019, staff of EDAN met in Beirut to review its strategic plan, to tackle the implications of their work for international advocacy, and to support the rapidly growing ranks of persons with disabilities in refugee camps and zones of conflict.

### **Seeing the faces of the climate poor**

The Busan assembly described those impacted most by climate change as “the new face of the poor, the widow and the stranger that are especially loved and cared for by God.” Delegates urged governments to prioritize care for creation and the common future, and to protect the human rights of communities threatened by climate change.

Over the years, and intensively after Busan, the WCC has been at the centre of campaigns for climate justice, helping create a global movement that unites millions of people around the world. In international meetings on climate change, the WCC has advocated for ecological justice, while its governing bodies have developed policy on responding to climate change.

Centred on the pilgrimage theme, WCC efforts to mobilize the churches, youth, and leaders of other religious traditions reached a climax in the lead-up to COP<sup>9</sup> 21 in Paris, the landmark UN-sponsored meeting in November 2015 of nearly 200 countries, which enacted the Paris Agreement.

At the next such conference, COP 22, in November 2016 in Marrakesh, Morocco, members of the ecumenical delegation, convened jointly by the WCC and ACT Alliance, called on the conference to translate into higher ambitions and concrete actions the hope and commitments generated by the Paris Agreement.

Earlier that year, in a speech titled “Creation is not for sale,” in Wittenberg, Germany, WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit noted, “We know that we have to act. And we know that we have to do this as churches together, and wherever possible also with people of other faiths.”

At the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York City in September 2019, WCC member churches renewed their determination to demand change from top leaders to take stronger measures to tackle the climate change emergency. The same month, WCC representatives walked alongside thousands of young people in peaceful protests in cities across the world, calling for action against climate change.

### **Committing to economic justice**

At the WCC’s 10th Assembly in Busan, delegates called for “economies of life” to promote economic justice, stating that there was something profoundly wrong when the wealth of the world’s three richest individuals is greater than the gross domestic product of the world’s 48 poorest countries.

Such disparities, delegates stated, threatened justice, social cohesion, and the public good within the global human community. The churches were urged to strongly commit to economic justice.

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<sup>9</sup> The COP is the supreme decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Since then, the WCC and its member churches have joined with peoples' movements and civil society to challenge poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Member churches have stressed "economies of life" as the key to peace in the marketplace, while strongly criticizing greed and emphasizing sufficiency.

In an economy of life, member churches are seeking a careful use of resources, sustainable production and consumption, redistributive growth, workers' rights, fair taxes and fair trade, and other conditions of justice.

In November 2014, the WCC invited churches, ecumenical organizations, and theological faculties to Geneva to engage in theological reflection and action on its foundational document, *Economy of Life: An Invitation to Theological Reflection and Action*.

Then, in November 2015, the WCC participated in a conference on the role of money and finance in the current economic and social order, entitled "Faith and Finance," in Bangkok, Thailand. Attended by Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims, the meeting again stressed the need to revisit the global financial system and critically re-think and constructively re-envision the functions of money and finance. Also that year, the WCC was part of a consortium called the Independent Commission for Reform of international Corporate Taxation, which produced a declaration and recommendation on how to tackle global tax evasion and avoidance.

In a different forum, WCC general secretary Tveit reminded the World Economic Forum in January 2017 that economic globalization created worrying challenges that needed to be addressed through systemic change.

In March 2019, the WCC released a "Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice." The five-step programme is aimed to help churches deal with the economy and their ecological surroundings.

### **Tackling water and sanitation challenges**

The challenge of access to clean water for communities in Africa and other developing nations is illustrated by the comments of Anglican Church of Kenya official Catherine Mwangi:

"I used to walk about three kilometres to and from school while I was in primary school.... We used to fetch water from a river. I saw piped water in high school, although once in a while we also used to fetch school water from the river," she related.

It is such challenges that the World Council of Churches has been seeking to address as part of the churches' commitment to water justice.

Recognizing water as a gift of God, the Ecumenical Water Network (WCC-EWN) has been empowering communities worldwide to access and protect clean water and sanitation, and to overcome crises around the resource. It has been ensuring WCC's common witness around water in global meetings and debates.

With concern about the human right to dignified sanitation, EWN has been joining the observance of World Toilet Day. According to the network, two-thirds of the world population does not have access to proper toilets, and 892 million people worldwide practice open defecation.

Since 2008, the network has also been providing theological reflections and other resources on water for the Seven Weeks of Lent and for World Water Day on 22 March.

On a fact-finding mission in 2014 to Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, the EWN noted the large disparities in access to clean water and sanitation in the region and particularly the dire situation in for Gaza's 1.8 million residents, whose water infrastructure has been repeatedly damaged in Israeli airstrikes. In 2016 EWN devoted its annual Lenten Bible studies, Seven Weeks for Water, to the quest for water justice in the Middle East.

In November 2016, the network gathered in Nigeria to discuss water as a basic human right in Africa and beyond. The gathering focused on issues of water and sanitation in the context of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which target universal access to clean water and sanitation by 2030.

Also in 2016, the WCC joined the Blue Communities Project and pledged to forego use of plastic water bottles. EWN has maintained that the use of bottled water is an impediment to the human right to water and actually promotes inequalities. In July 2019, EWN supported residents of Divonne-les-Bains, France, in resisting the opening of a mineral water bottling plant.

In 2017 EWN promoted a series of reflections on issues of water in Africa, a continent facing serious water challenges due to desertification, water grabs, and misuse. A public presentation of Seven Weeks of Water took place in Abuja, Nigeria, in February 2017, and then in Ethiopia the following month.

The network has been taking the lead in organizing a faith event during World Water Week, showcasing the faith's best practices in tackling the Sustainable Development Goal on water and sanitation. Recently, the network has organized WCC Eco-School on Water, Food and Climate Justice. The second session convened in San Salvador, El Salvador, in July 2018.

In Stockholm, Sweden, in August 2019, the network participated in the World Water Week for the fourth successive year.

### **Building churches' HIV competency**

From investing in school children to developing new champions in the efforts against HIV and AIDS, WCC's Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (WCC-EHAIA) has taken a leading role.

The initiative has been promoting HIV competence among churches for more than 30 years, while working with theological institutions to integrate and mainstream HIV education into theological curricula as well as addressing the root causes of the pandemic.

It has worked with people living with HIV, those with disabilities, adolescents, youth, women, men, grandparents, sex workers, injecting drug users, prisoners, migrants, sexual minorities, and other marginalized groups. It has also sought to ensure that church leaders and theologians involve all those who are usually excluded, and that church-owned schools, theological institutions, and universities are directly involved in providing services.

Recently, it has sought to accelerate HIV services to reach men and children, to serve a new generation affected by the disease, and to address issues related to gender, masculinity, and sexual violence.

Expanding its reach in recent years, and frequently working with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (WCC-EAA, see chapter four), EHAIA has strengthened its HIV response in sub-Saharan Africa, Jamaica, and the Philippines. This effort has included scaling up the link between

HIV and sexual gender-based-violence through the Tamar Campaign and Thursdays in Black. It has also integrated sexual reproductive health education with adolescents and young people into its work, using effective intergenerational communication skills on stigma, discrimination, gender justice, femininity, and masculinity studies

Scaling up its efforts at HIV prevention, testing, treatment and pastoral accompaniment, the programme collaborated in the WCC-EAA focus on unmet HIV paediatric and adolescent treatment and HIV among migrants and refugees. It has promoted the campaign “Leading by Example: Religious Leaders and HIV Testing,” at the local and international level, using the hashtag #KnowYourStatus to encourage testing for HIV.

Innovative approaches and joint actions to reach young men, adolescent girls and young women, and HIV-positive children, with HIV prevention and treatment services are urgently needed, as well as efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children, which significantly increases their risk of HIV infection, underlined speakers at an interfaith breakfast meeting in New York City on 26 September 2019.

The initiative has continued to address stigma, discrimination, and non-adherence to treatment. A key highlight in its recent work was the production in 2019 of *Treatment Adherence and Faith Healing in the Context of HIV and AIDS in Africa*, a series of manuals that emerged out of the realization that exclusive claims of faith healing are compromising adherence to antiretroviral therapy.

### **Confronting hunger and sustaining the anti-HIV agenda**

With hunger striking at communities around the world year after year, the WCC-Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (WCC- EAA), at its general assembly in 2013, resolved to work together “on eradicating hunger, promoting adequate nutrition, and striving towards just and sustainable food systems.”

The alliance emphasized the need for sustainable agricultural practices and for small-scale producers to have access to and control over natural resources, such as land, water, and seeds.

EAA was founded in 2000 to promote broad ecumenical cooperation in advocacy for justice – both in terms of Christian traditions and in types of organizations; in 2015 it was re-established as a WCC ecumenical initiative.

Food security and sustainable agriculture are one of the focus areas of WCC-EAA. The alliance initiated the annual week-long global campaign, the Churches’ Week of Action on Food, which invites the global ecumenical movement and organizations to act collectively for food justice.

The other focus is HIV and AIDS, where the alliance has mobilized faith leaders and communities to help end AIDS in children by 2020, reminding governments of the June 2016 United Nations’ Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS Commitments.

In advocacy and dialogue with pharmaceutical companies, WCC-EAA has promoted comprehensive agreements between companies and the Medicines Patent Pool to ensure affordable and accessible treatment, particularly for children.

Beyond these initiatives, to ensure that the progress against HIV is not lost, WCC-EAA has maintained pressure on governments and the private sector to strengthen global efforts. The convening role of the WCC-EAA at national and international events, such as organizing the National Prayer Breakfast in the USA, and its involvement in international UN events and the

International AIDS Conference, has contributed greatly to the audibility of the prophetic voice of churches in these areas on the global agenda.

The WCC has also been developing a global ecumenical health strategy to meet the new health challenges worldwide, facilitating network and dialogue through its Health and Healing programme. This has taken on greater significance with the COVID-19 pandemic, where the WCC has produced resources and offered opportunities for churches to come together to coordinate their responses. In November 2020, the WCC published a “Global Health COVID-19 Response Framework,” following consultations between church and healthcare leaders from many countries. The WCC has also partnered with other organizations in responding to COVID-19, as when in December 2020 the WCC and the World Jewish Congress issued a call for global equity in the distribution of available vaccines, ensuring those living in poorer countries are not excluded.

The WCC has a longstanding relationship on health issues with the UN and particularly with the WHO, and in 2018 the WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus made a presentation at the WCC’s central committee supporting the Ecumenical Global Health Strategy approved there.

### **A new ecumenical global health strategy**

The WCC’s Health and Healing programme facilitates networking and dialogue to promote health and healing for all people. In 2018, the WCC approved a new ecumenical health strategy to meet continuing and new health challenges worldwide.

Health is more than physical and mental well-being, and healing is not primarily medical. Health and healing were a central feature of Jesus’ ministry and of his call to his followers, and the church has been engaged in health services for centuries.

Components of the strategy include close coordination with Christian health associations and with agencies of the United Nations. By stimulating dialogue among faith-based networks and within civil society, the WCC contributes to reflection on the theological basis of medical mission as well as to the development of new concepts of Christian health care.

Such coordination can be crucial. In September 2014, for example, with rising cases of the Ebola epidemic in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the WCC convened representatives of Christian aid organizations and United Nations agencies to learn from each other, to escalate their efforts, and to draw on the churches’ extensive grassroots networks. The WCC also worked with partner organizations to develop guidelines for “Safe and Dignified Burial Practices,” replacing an old approach and helping reduce infections.

### **Welcoming Indigenous Peoples**

At the Busan assembly, member churches called for the respect of Indigenous Peoples’ spiritualities and support of their aspirations for self-determination. In recommendations, they urged the WCC general secretary to give special attention to Indigenous Peoples’ issues during the WCC’s next programme period.

In December 2015, the Indigenous Peoples’ Programme created an Indigenous Peoples’ Programme Reference Group (IPPRG) and held its first meeting at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. With the formation of the IPPRG, the programme started to operate as an ecumenical initiative. The group emphasized that the relationship to the earth, as emphasized in Indigenous Peoples’ religiosity, was integral to the spiritual vision of a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.



Central to the programme are the creation of a viable Ecumenical Indigenous Peoples' Network, advocacy for Indigenous Peoples' rights, and raising the profile of Indigenous Peoples' spiritualities and theologies in the WCC fellowship and the whole ecumenical movement.

Indigenous Peoples have insisted that their collective right to freedom, peace, and security is key to their lives and survival as distinct peoples who face constant threats. For decades, Indigenous Peoples have asserted their rightful dignity, visibility, and self-determined space. A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace that includes Indigenous Peoples means also a transformative learning process for the churches.

### **Working for a racism-free world**

The WCC and the Roman Catholic Church's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development jointly organized a conference on "Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration" in September 2018 in Rome. A "Global Forum for Faith Action for Children on the Move" followed during the next month, in partnership with World Vision International and several other leading faith-based organizations.

With racism being the thematic focus of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in 2019 and 2020, the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) organized a series of eight regional expert web-based seminars (webinars) on the issue of racism and racial justice.

The August to December webinars were aimed at exploring how racism manifests itself in the respective regions, learning about the churches' and ecumenical partners' work in the area, and identifying synergies and avenues for possible collaboration. In October 2019, the CCIA convened a webinar on racism, xenophobia, and discrimination in Africa, for example, following a similar dialogue on North America, convened in September.

Ecumenical engagement with racism and its effects was highlighted through a series of Pilgrim Team Visits to churches in Asia and in a special consultation in Japan in 2019. From late February to early March 2019, members of the Reference Group of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace visited Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, Pakistan, and Thailand. Organized and hosted by councils of churches and by the Christian Conference of Asia, each visit focused on "Building Peace and Human Dignity" in the various contexts. The visit to Bangladesh, for example, touched on issues of stateless persons, refugees, religious intolerance, gender violence, and poverty, while the Indian visit focused on the issue of caste discrimination there. A separate pilgrim team visited sites in the Philippines in August of the same year to learn about and take up issues of human rights there.

Serious and sustained reflection on "Global Manifestations of Racism Today" brought 25 ecumenical theologians and leaders to a forum sponsored by the Theological Study Group of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Tokyo, Japan, in September 2019, which also addressed forms of discrimination in Japan itself. This was followed in 2020 by a series of webinars organized by the Theological Study Group offering theological reflections on "Hate Speech and Whiteness." In October 2020, the WCC executive committee approved a new programmatic initiative on racism to be implemented from January 2021.

### **Committing to children**

Much of the approach of the WCC to diaconal issues after the assembly in Busan can be seen in the "Churches' Commitments to Children," described on page 67.

## Chapter Three: Spirituality, Formation, and Prayer

Christians from all over the world and from a spectrum of traditions arrive each year in Switzerland, to learn and inspire each other while staying in some impressive Swiss buildings often flanked partially by snow-capped hills with a spectacular view of Lac Léman.

The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey lies on the outskirts of Geneva, housed in the 18th-century Château de Bossey. In 2016 it celebrated 70 years as a prized institution in the quest for Christian unity as a place where students live, learn, and pray together, enhancing their ecumenical formation.

### **Praying together and spirituality at the centre of the quest for church unity.**

Rev. Margaritha Veen, a Protestant pastor from the Netherlands who studied at the institute in 1998-1999, observed at a celebration on 13 October 2016, “If there is one place in this world where the ecumenical spirit can truly be seen, then for me that place is Bossey.”

She was one of the alumni who spoke at the book launch of *The Story of Bossey: A Laboratory for Ecumenical Life*, authored by Rev. Dr Hans-Ruedi Weber and updated by Rev. Dr Robert K. Welsh, a student at the institute in 1969-1970.

Veen alluded to Bossey’s small but beautiful chapel and the powerful spiritual impact it has on those who pray there.

“Thanks to Bossey’s chapel, I experienced a way of worshipping where we were united with all our stories, backgrounds and traditions, whether or not we wished to be. This ecumenical spirituality helps me in a positive and inspiring way for myself and my parish work today.”

Dr Welsh, who later served as an ecumenical officer for the Disciples of Christ, USA, said, “The most rewarding aspect of this work has been to discover the growing impact that Bossey has had in serving as the avant-garde of the whole ecumenical movement.

“It has moved from being a quiet, isolated academic community on Lac Léman to becoming a meeting place for the world’s agenda in addressing issues of peace and globalization, of interfaith encounter, and of the care for God’s creation and eco-justice.

“The message of Bossey is finally borne out in the lives of persons who have been touched and marked and shaped by this place and its programmes - persons scattered across the whole world: proclaiming a vision of what it means to be “God’s people” beyond the boundaries of nation, class, race, gender, and denominational or confessional identity,” said Welsh.

The Ecumenical Institute, like the movement itself, he said, should be a bridge of reconciliation and healing in the church and the world, “reconciled and grounded in the same faith and same Lord.”

### **“Alignment with the poor”: Education for praxis**

Another of Bossey’s prominent graduates is the Rev. Dr Ofelia Ortega Suárez from Cuba, who is over 80 years of age and is a former Bossey faculty member and former WCC president from the Caribbean/Latin America. Students at the Ecumenical Institute who heard her speak in November 2018 about the “WCC at 70: Achievements and Hopes” said she has the lively spirit and enthusiasm of a 20-year-old.

“If you think that if you are going to be a pastor or a priest you are going to be in the pulpit, you’re wrong,” she said striding across the hall floor to listen to students’ questions, in a very personal way urging them, like her, to “dream of a better world.”

Ortega said that the commitment of the WCC to defending life has been permanent in its theological “alignment with the poor of the world through programmes of associated churches in favour of health, education, work, cooperation and the unity of humanity.”

One student told her that she is proof that age is just a number, as she described 23 August 1948, when the WCC was inaugurated, as “the miracle that would be the foundation of what is happening at the WCC today.”

Ortega knows the institute well, having graduated from the 1967-1968 class at Bossey, and she was the keynote speaker at the 12 November 2017 “*Dies academicus*” a special gathering at the institute.

That day involved all Bossey’s students coming from nations including Canada, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Korea, Thailand, Ukraine, Zambia, and others who showed their work in presentations and shared their experiences.

### **A holistic ecumenism**

The institute also enables direct contact with people of different faiths each northern summer.

A significant step was taken at a seminar in Bossey in March 2019, where master’s students who come from different Christian traditions shared the course with visiting Muslim students. Previously, such groups would come, visit, and have their own courses, without any intentionally planned interaction.

Each year, the institute organizes an Interreligious Summer School, bringing together students from a variety of world religious traditions to learn about each other’s spiritual traditions, reflect on their sacred scriptures, and participate in lectures and workshops on interfaith issues.

This new seminar is part of the institute’s effort to respond to the call of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to walk together with peoples of other faiths. The Ecumenical Institute continues to pursue this more holistic perspective in ecumenical formation.

Starting in April 2021 the institute expanded its repertoire of courses in ecumenical studies to include a course offered fully online to expand opportunities for students to explore the biblical, theological, ethical, societal, interreligious and missiological dimensions of ecumenism.

### **“Good news of salvation”**

Spirituality and theology also figured largely in discussions and prayer at the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism held in Arusha, Tanzania, March 2018 (see page 40). ‘

After that conference, Bishop Dr Solomon Jacob Masangwa of the North Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, spoke about spreading the good news of salvation. “Evangelism is a total service to humanity, to spread the good news of salvation. What I mean here is to prepare the soul and the heart to be friendly with God,” he said. “The church is actually a change agent.”

The conference shifted the notion of mission and evangelism, to centre on learning from those at the margins of society and through “transforming discipleship,” evangelizing more through example and engagement than through preaching.

At the same conference, Dr Mutale Mulenga-Kaunda, a Zambian post-doctoral research fellow in Gender and Religion at South Africa’s University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, delivered a keynote speech.

“Storytelling has always been at the core of African women theologians’ thinking as an approach to critically engage with our African realities. Stories are the key elements that constitute the oral text for so-called history or rather herstory,” she said.

She spoke of the importance of storytelling “as a relevant missiological lens by sharing a brief personal narrative” as she explained how her belonging to a Pentecostal family as a young African woman of faith forms her identity.

In Arusha, the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2018 came to the fore as a global ecumenical short-term study and exposure programme accompanying the conference. Gathering more than 100 theology students from around the world, GETI 2018 was the second ecumenical formation programme the WCC offered alongside one of its major ecumenical events, after the initial GETI at the 10th Assembly in 2013 in Busan.

The Arusha gathering was preceded by a women’s preconference at which around 50 women from different contexts came out with a message and recommendations for the conference itself, calling for the holistic participation of women in mission, and highlighting concrete actions for justice, peace, and reconciliation, as well as challenges concerning theological education.

Also present in Arusha was the Ecumenical Disability Advocates’ Network (EDAN), bringing from their 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; and the Pan African Women’s Ecumenical Empowerment Network (PAWEEN), which seeks to serve as a platform for academic study, spiritual reflection, and action by women of Africa and of African descent.

### **The pilgrimage of prayer**

Prayer is at the very heart of the ecumenical movement. Indeed, the basis and goal of the WCC’s search for unity is Jesus’ own prayer that his disciples may all be one (John 17:21).

A vital component of ecumenical spirituality is the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, first published by the WCC in 1978. It now belongs to the ecumenical movement at large, offering prayers for a different region or set of countries each week. It enables an annual, global pilgrimage of prayer through every region, and every week affirms solidarity with Christians living in diverse situations, experiencing wide-ranging problems, and sharing different gifts. . Online the prayer cycle is also available in French, German and Spanish, and can be included on websites or blogs.

Building a global spirituality of solidarity, the prayer cycle is thus a spiritual expression of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. Among the most popular initiatives of the WCC, it has been refreshed and renewed, to reflect current realities on the ground and to incorporate new prayers, with a new edition published in 2021, titled *Pilgrim Prayers*.

Such solidarity and love are often most readily heard in the distinctive, joyful, globally sourced music that inspires and lifts the ecumenical movement in spirited melody and percussion.

### **International days of prayer**

Each year, Christians are asked to join Jesus' prayer for his disciples that "they may be one so that the world may believe." In this crowning event of ecumenical fellowship, hearts are touched, and Christians come together to pray for their unity in different weeks in the northern and southern congregations and as parishes all over the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services.

The event that touches off this special experience is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, since 1965 organized as a joint initiative of the WCC and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, but whose roots go back more than 100 years. The week also includes a special time of prayer held in the Ecumenical Chapel at the WCC in Geneva. In 2021, due to the pandemic, the gathering in the chapel was replaced by the WCC's first global ecumenical prayer online, involving heads of churches, members of the WCC leadership and governing bodies, the community of students from the Ecumenical Institute Bossey, colleagues from the World Council of Churches, from Christian world communions, International Christian organizations and partners, the sisters from the Grandchamp Community. More than 1500 people throughout the world followed the prayers online.

The WCC has also sponsored other international days of prayer, sometimes coinciding with international observances or with seasons in the church year, for example, days of prayer around issues of hunger or food security or weeks of prayer during Lent, that are focused on clean water. As noted, the WCC has also partnered several times with the National Council of Churches in Korea, including in the 2019 Global Day of Prayer for peace, denuclearization, and reunification on the Korean Peninsula.

Another such invitation to solidarity in prayer is the annual International Day of Prayer for Peace, on 21 September, when church organizations, congregations, and people of faith are encouraged to bear a common witness to peace. They do so by participating in worship services, educational events, and acts of support in favour of peace and justice for Palestinians and Israelis. The day of prayer is part of a larger annual observance of the "World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel," a full week in which churches are invited to prayer, education, and advocacy, creating a common witness for justice and solidarity in hope. In 2020, the pandemic meant the week was observed differently with an online prayer service hosted by the WCC on the theme "Creative Solidarity in Common Fragility."

### **Prayers for the COVID-19 pandemic**

The WCC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been deeply rooted in prayer. Since March 2020, prayer in the Ecumenical Centre chapel have been replaced with online prayer gatherings and the distribution of written prayer texts. These are also made available publicly in the WCC website and shared in social media as prayer cards with an inspirational image. Each Wednesday: a prayer for these times from the wider fellowship is shared. These prayer cards have been among the most popular content in WCC channels in 2020.

In April 2020, hundreds of participants from across the world joined a WCC webinar on "How to be the church when building are closed?" Almost a year later, a Week of Prayer was organized in March 2021 to mark the first anniversary of the COVID-19 being declared a pandemic with partners including regional ecumenical organizations, Christian world communions and the World Evangelical Alliance. To mark the anniversary the WCC published a special book of prayers, *Voices*

*of Lament, Hope and Courage*, with prayers drawn from churches and denominations across the world.

## Chapter Four: Building Trust and Understanding

*“Citizenship and peaceful co-existence are the greatest challenges that have to be focused on and built upon to counter fanaticism, terrorism and baseless theological claims and conceptualizations.”*

— **Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, His Eminence Prof. Dr Ahmad Al-Tayyeb**

The Grand Imam spoke during a historic Muslim-Christian dialogue that unfolded during a visit of religious leaders from Egypt to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva and the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, in 2016.

With the theme “Towards an Integrated World,” the visit was a fine example of how the WCC has carved new pathways in interreligious dialogue while thoughtfully maintaining existing relationships with agencies and ecumenical partners outside the fellowship.

Speaking of the relevance of interreligious dialogue in today’s world, WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit welcomed the Grand Imam. “The importance of pilgrimage is recognized in many religions, and certainly in both Christianity and Islam we know that what we learn about ourselves and our world through being on a pilgrimage can bring us closer to God,” he said.

The WCC also hosts the “Building Bridges” seminar for Christian and Muslim scholars, now in its 18th year. Dr Tveit described it as “surely one of the most sustained initiatives of this kind in Muslim-Christian dialogue, bringing together over the years many of the world’s leading Muslim and Christian scholars.”

Events such as these were coupled with landmark renewals of interreligious dialogues, such as the WCC and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultation restoring formal relations and agreeing to strengthen their communication. The two organizations met formally in 2019 to consider “The Normalization of Hatred: Challenges for Jews and Christians Today.”

A jointly-issued communiqué stated: “Among the issues that informed this gathering were: the rise of xenophobic nationalist movements in much of the world; suspicion of the agendas of religious communities and institutions, especially in Europe; the resurgence of overt antisemitism; the prevalence of Islamophobia; newly emerging anti-Christian attitudes; the continuing non-resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; worldwide hostility to vulnerable minorities; and the shocking erosion of civil society in many places and ways.”

In fact, these same issues – xenophobia, extremism leading to violence, racism, and injustice - were the veins running through nearly every interreligious dialogue since 2013.

Also notable among interreligious encounters was the historic gathering in 2019 of 65 scholars of Buddhist-Christian relations in Germany for a dialogue organized by the European Network of Buddhist Christian Studies in association with the WCC. The conference focused on the theme “Buddhist-Christian Encounter – A Visionary Approach.”

YATRA, or Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity, is an interreligious training programme launched by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2014 following its 10th Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea. The choice of name for the programme is intended to reflect the idea of a pilgrimage of justice and peace. YATRA is a common term for the word “pilgrimage” in many Indo-Asian religions and languages. The YATRA programme is an intensive training course to equip young Christians from Asia to build up communities of harmony and hope from an interreligious perspective.

Another first: a visit from Dr Syafiq A. Mughni, special envoy of the President of Indonesia for Interfaith and Inter-civilizational Dialogue and Cooperation. “I have worked with several churches in Indonesia in the humanitarian context, but this is the first opportunity I have to learn about the World Council of Churches,” said Dr Mughni.

### **WCC dialogue with the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, Tehran.**

Begun in 1995, and so marking its 25th anniversary in 2020, the relationship between WCC’s office for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue in Tehran has ensured regular contact between WCC and the world of Shi’a Islam. A wide range of themes has been explored at the dialogue meetings, held every two to three years.

One of the key relationships for the WCC’s office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue is with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). In addition to annual meetings with the PCID, in August 2020, the WCC and the PCID released a joint document, *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action During COVID-19 and Beyond*, encouraging churches and Christian organizations to reflect on the importance of interreligious solidarity in a world wounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

From 2019, *Current Dialogue*, the WCC’s journal of interreligious dialogue, has been published annually by Wiley as a special issue of the WCC journal, *The Ecumenical Review*.

### **Together against extremism**

Sadly, many of these interreligious conversations centred on or were sparked, at least in part, by attacks that have been growing over the years in places of worship. Within interreligious dialogue, it has become important to discuss not only how to protect people but also the root causes of religiously couched extremism and violence.

Prompted by the growth such violence, the WCC’s central committee in June 2016 called on its member churches and partners “to give priority to reflecting on issues of religion and violence in their own contexts, taking seriously the need for openness to and appropriate support for those who may be seen as ‘other’ in each situation; to support fellow Christians who are suffering as a result of religiously-motivated violence; to extend such support not only to Christians but also to others who suffer similarly; and above all to speak words of Christian love for all into situations of violence and division.”

### **Historic visits build trust**

*“For us as Christians, walking together is not a ploy to strengthen our own positions, but an act of obedience to the Lord and love for our world.”*

**—Pope Francis**

Marking the WCC’s 70th Anniversary, Pope Francis made a historic visit to Geneva in June 2018 described as an “Ecumenical Pilgrimage – Walking, Praying and Working Together.” He said that he had come “a pilgrim in quest of unity and peace,” an unprecedented commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to the cause of ecumenism.

“For us as Christians,” Pope Francis said in his message at the WCC, “walking together is not a ploy to strengthen our own positions, but an act of obedience to the Lord and love for our world. Let us ask the Father to help us walk together all the more resolutely in the ways of the Spirit.”



Before and after the visit, the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church continued to strengthen their links, with the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC celebrated 50 years of theological reflection and practical collaboration in 2015.

In 2019, the Roman Catholic Church presented its formal response to the WCC convergence text, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the fruit of three decades of international ecumenical conversation about what it means to be the church.

Responding after consulting widely with bishops and theologians, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity praised *The Church's* appraisal of “greater common ground on ecclesiology” among the churches and its acknowledgment of “the three essential elements of communion concern faith, worship and ministry or service” alongside scripture and tradition.

The response was unequivocal in its ecumenical pursuit. “The most fundamental convergence is found in the affirmation that unity among Christians is vital for fulfilling the church’s mission of proclaiming the good news of reconciliation in the Lord and that this is a biblical mandate,” it said.

In addition to the Roman Catholic Church, the WCC has also strengthened partnerships with other Christian communities. For example, since the Busan assembly, the Joint Consultative Group between Pentecostals and the WCC has been in its third round of consultation and will report to the WCC assembly in 2021. The Global Christian Forum has provided a venue where the WCC, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Evangelical Alliance, and the Roman Catholic Church share responsibility for engaging the leaders of churches in conversations of faith and witness.

Among the important and widely used contemporary ecumenical statements is *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, jointly developed by the WCC’s interreligious team, the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance. The brief document encourages churches, church councils, and mission agencies to reflect seriously on their current mission practices, to avoid proselytism, and to use the recommendations for conduct in the document in preparing their own guidelines for their witness and mission among those of different religions and among those who do not profess any particular religion.

The WCC also revived a longstanding relationship with United Bible Societies through a 2016 meeting of the executive teams and subsequent collaboration in publishing and Bible-related initiatives. Likewise, representatives of the World Evangelical Alliance and the WCC convened in 2015 in Bossey to discuss and explore possible areas of future collaboration.

The WCC joined the Lutheran World Federation, other churches and political leaders, to mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s Reformation in Wittenberg, Germany, where on 31 October 1517 Luther promulgated his 95 Theses denouncing church abuses.

In advance of the anniversary, the WCC general secretary took part in an historic ecumenical service in Lund, Sweden, in October 2016. There, Pope Francis and representatives of the Lutheran World Federation not only acknowledged the gifts of the Reformation but also decried the deep conflicts and divisions that followed it. The occasion also celebrated the considerable gains of ecumenical dialogue since the Second Vatican Council, including the landmark agreement signed in 1999 by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, the “Joint

Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” and, since then, signed or affirmed by the Anglican, Methodist, and Reformed communions.

Yet another partnership - this one between the WCC and ACT Alliance - deepened as well. In a historic joint meeting in Uppsala in 2018, the WCC and ACT Alliance focused on ecumenical *diakonia* and sustainable development, discerning how the organizations can work together in service to the world and how that work contributes to the broader agenda for sustainable development.

Together, the organizations have deepened their understanding of what it means to be both faith- and rights-based by taking a look at prophetic *diakonia* and advocacy as integral parts of their collective work. The two organizations also released joint statements on situations in Nicaragua and Gaza, strengthening their collective global voice in a clarion call for human rights.

Historic visits of world religious leaders to the Ecumenical Centre and the WCC marked recent years, particularly associated with the WCC’s 70th Anniversary celebrations. Along with the Grand Imam of Al-Ahzar, Prof. Dr Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, and the Muslim Council of Elders, the WCC welcomed representatives of the International Council of Christians and Jews, and Dr Syafiq A. Mughni, special envoy of the president of Indonesia for Interfaith and Inter-civilizational Dialogue and Cooperation.

### **Peace on the Korean Peninsula**

As described, the worldwide ecumenical movement has been engaged in promoting dialogue, peaceful co-existence, and the reunification of the divided Korean people for more than 30 years.

### **Work on disarmament continues**

The WCC’s work related to disarmament continued to grow and expand, even as the world faces increasing injustice and tensions that threaten peace daily.

Representatives from the WCC regularly joined diplomats, peace activists, researchers, and chaplains from across the globe for forums and dialogue on arms control initiatives, as well as “roadmaps” for foreign ministries in Moscow, Berlin, and Washington.

The WCC has also been working with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, or ICAN, to ensure that, as each United Nations member state goes through its Universal Periodic Review by the Human Rights Council, a short report is submitted calling on that state to sign or ratify the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. ICAN was recognized for its work by receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017.

From disarmament to climate change, from promoting an Economy of Life to combating extremism to encouraging good health, the WCC, with programmes and partnerships, continues to highlight voices of faith in advocating for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

In its strategic and yearly planning, the council has made efforts to align its programmatic work to the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **Young people: “Ambassadors of heaven”**

Members of the WCC ECHOS Commission on Youth visited Al Azhar Mosque and University in Cairo in 2015 for a meeting with the Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayyeb.

The purpose of the meeting was to strengthen commission members' understanding of inter-religious dialogue, with a particular focus on its relevance to the challenges facing youth today. With the Grand Imam, ECHOS commissioners reflected on issues of inter-religious marriage, the increase in atheism among youth, and the possibility of future cooperation between ECHOS and Al Azhar.

"I see you as ambassadors of heaven," the Grand Imam told them. "We recognize Christianity and Judaism, like Islam, as religions of the Book, and therefore accept these as forming one community. Al Azhar is ready and willing to cooperate with ECHOS in any way you wish, so we can spread our faith to people in the East and in the West."

The WCC and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) deepened their existing collaboration, exploring joint projects to protect and provide for children and signing a "Memorandum of Collaboration 2018-2021." Formal global collaboration between the WCC and UNICEF began in September 2015. As a result of the first two years of work together, a comprehensive participatory process involving 235 experts rallied WCC member churches to monitor and promote children's rights in their communities and within their congregations through the initiative, "Churches' Commitments to Children."

Receiving a strongly positive response from churches around the world, the focus has been on the churches' roles in the protection of children, the participation of children, and provision for children's future through addressing climate change. The effort has developed an innovative platform to facilitate networking and collaboration among churches and partners. In June 2017, the WCC, UNICEF, and World Vision produced a guide to help churches implement their commitments.

The joint action plan, recently renewed, supports churches in their grassroots engagements for and with children.

In 2019, the WCC released the English version video of a puppet show, "Children on board – WCC – We Care about Children", introducing the WCC to children and how it works for children's rights. Featuring puppet characters Theo and Popette and their human adult mentor Madam Florence, the video introduces human rights from a child's perspective. In the show, Theo and Popette discover a mysterious boat marked with the letters WCC, while Madame Florence gently helps the puppets to discover how the WCC works for the one human family. "We could even say that on this boat, we want more rights for children," she tells Theo and Popette. "The right to have a place to be safe, the right to be treated when we are ill, the right to be protected if we are disabled, the right to have enough to eat, the right to be in a family, the right to play, the right to go to school...."

Young people have also been leading the way in activism for climate change, and the WCC fellowship has been joining in both prayerful observations and determined actions to address what has become a climate emergency.

Across the globe, WCC member churches walked alongside young people as they peacefully marched before and after the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019, calling upon their government officials, churches, and all the adults in their lives to not just say the right words but to begin a transformation in their daily lives. The WCC continues to convene and advocate for those most affected by climate change - who are often those least responsible for causing it. A number of publications have been developed to support these actions. In June 2020 the WCC

intergenerational climate justice project was awarded the Keeling Curve Prize, a recognition for initiatives that offer solutions to reduce global warming.

Children were also a focus for WCC's work with the UN Refugee Agency, as wars and conflict continued to force thousands of families to flee their homes every day. The WCC hosted dialogues, made special statements, and appealed to all people of good will to support the UN's #WithRefugees campaign. The WCC asked - and is still asking - us to raise our voices, to ensure that every refugee child gets an education, that every refugee family has somewhere safe to live, and that every refugee can work or learn new skills to make a positive contribution to their community.

Children are at the centre of the WCC-EAA advocacy campaign on HIV treatment for children: both as actors when writing letter to government leaders and pharmaceutical companies, and as beneficiaries in the increased access to treatment for children.

The WCC also continued its partnership with the World Health Organization, attending and facilitating workshops on HIV and AIDS prevention, healthy communities, and other topics. The WCC has offered an increasing number of resources to not only encourage good health but to nurture more inclusive communities for those with different abilities and disabilities, and also for those in our communities who are struggling with particular challenges. Intergenerational workshops that encourage local church leaders to relate to and create "safe spaces" for adolescents and children have been developed.

The WCC's annual ecumenical school on Governance, Economics and Management for an Economy of Life continued to flourish, drawing young people from across the globe from diverse contexts. The school helps build a critical understanding of economics, the workings of international markets, processes of globalization and financialization, and prevailing global governance structures. "Indeed, economics is a matter of faith," said Admire Mutizwa, a young economist working with the Zimbabwe Council of Churches.

## Chapter Five: Inspiring and Innovative Communication

*“Unity has a lot to do with information and communication. The work we do for unity is not only something we should share information about, it is also something we pursue through means of communication . . . I am more and more convinced that ecumenism increasingly will be about communication.”*

- Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC general secretary

Communication is central to the work of the World Council of Churches in inspiring and empowering the fellowship of churches and ecumenical partners in their commitments for life, justice, and peace, as well as in reaching broader audiences to communicate the values and perspective of the WCC and its member churches.

Following the Busan assembly, the WCC communications committee in 2014 described communication as being “based on our faith that the incarnation of the Word of God was, as such, an act of communication which communicated the divine to the human and was transmitted to the world through communicative mission (*kerygma*).” An implication of this conviction is the belief that the WCC “must be a catalyst for change – for a world with unity, justice and peace at its heart,” and that communication reflects this mission as the WCC relates to individual church members, churches, and the world with which it interacts.

The message noted that there is no community without relationships and no relationships without communication, and that sometimes telling the truth entails offering a counter-narrative to stories in the public sphere.

In looking toward the Karlsruhe assembly, the WCC’s communication strategy has been built around four main dimensions: fellowship communication, prophetic communication, advocacy communication, and accountable communication, as well as capacity building for member churches and ecumenical partners.

- Communication is crucial to the *fellowship* and its credibility. Communication comes from the Latin word *communicare*, meaning to share. Communication in the WCC expects participation and transparency in order to build fellowship – to walk, pray and work together.
- The WCC is committed to *prophetic* communication, lifting up and conveying the authentic experiences, stories, insights, and values of people and communities within the churches that might otherwise not be heard, even if they are critical of our habitual or accepted practices or challenge principalities and powers.
- In *advocacy* communication, the WCC seeks to inspire and invite its member churches to work together, actively lending weight to the churches’ common voice, and fostering a world with unity, justice, and peace at its heart.
- The WCC is committed to *accountable* communication, with transparency in its work methods and accountability to member churches and partners, seeking to convey truth and countering falsehoods that threaten understanding and dialogue.

### **Raising the visibility and impact of ecumenism**

“The goal of WCC communications is to raise the profile and impact of the work of the WCC,” says the WCC’s 2018 – 2021 communication strategy document, using a variety of means and reflecting the core Christian and ecumenical values of the WCC.

It notes that communication is an important strategic tool for the WCC and its member churches and ecumenical partners to sustain influence, gain visibility, and promote worthy causes.

“Ensuring relevant, credible, transparent and well-coordinated communication in a timely manner is a pivotal task for WCC Communication,” says the plan.

Some of the challenges of this work have come to the fore in communicating within and about areas of deep conflict, such as the Middle East, where the WCC has been active in peacebuilding for decades. The WCC’s Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) programme, for example, in 2019 encountered inaccurate and unfair reporting from some media about its protective international presence in local communities, documenting human rights violations, and gathering eyewitness stories of life in Palestine and Israel.

The WCC’s work was done through powerful storytelling in words and pictures in the age-old tradition of credible reporting with genuine human-interest content.

The council aims to reach a wide audience, which is international as well as local. It includes the WCC membership, its committees, and commissions, as well as the media and the public in the churches and at large.

There has been significant increase of use of the WCC resources online during 2020: visits to the [www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org) increased more than 50 percent compared to 2019, having more than 1,3 million visits by more than 1million visitors. Since October 2020 when the new WCC website was launched, its attendance grew more than twice comparing to the same months a year ago.

All the while, the WCC’s communication seeks to inspire and invite its member churches to work together, actively lending weight to the churches’ common voice, knowing that the member churches are the heart of the council.

A high-profile example of WCC’s communications work was carried out during the visit of Pope Francis to the Ecumenical Centre on 21 June 2018. This was emblematic of the WCC’s work and an affirmation of the shared ecumenical journey of “Walking, Praying and Working Together,” a pilgrimage that embraces Christians of all regions and confessions and their intersection with the world.

The professional work of WCC communicators facilitated messaging by over 400 journalists to many hundreds of millions of people all over the world, highlighting the importance of the visit for the unity of churches and Christians everywhere.

### **Reaching out through prophetic and advocacy communication**

A key strategic component is for the WCC to focus on communicating the living fellowship working, walking and praying together. The WCC communication strategy suggests that it should also reflect and promote reflection on the role of communication in building just and peaceful communities.”

***Thursdays in Black.*** One of those stands for justice has been the simple yet profound Thursdays in Black campaign of resistance and resilience, led by the WCC, which now has global traction in churches and in secular communities. It highlights that in every country, gender-based violence is a tragic reality. This violence is frequently hidden, and victims are often silent, fearing stigma and further violence.

Through the simple gesture of wearing black on Thursdays, the campaign leads people to grasp their responsibility to speak out against violence, to ensure that women and men, boys and girls,

are safe from rape and violence in homes, schools, work, and in the streets – in all places in our societies.

“Wear black on Thursdays. Wear a pin to declare you are part of the global movement resisting attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence. Show your respect for women who are resilient in the face of injustice and violence. Encourage others to join you. The campaign says that black has often been used with negative racial connotations. In this campaign black is used as a colour of resistance and resilience,” urge the campaign’s organizers.

***Caring for creation.*** Prophetic and advocacy communications also extend to the WCC’s messaging on creation. The WCC Ecumenical Water Network (WCC-EWN), for example, has used the Lenten season to reflect on water. Since 2008, the WCC-EWN through its campaign “Seven Weeks for Water” has provided weekly theological reflections and other resources on water for the seven weeks of Lent and for World Water Day on 22 March.

In all its prophetic communication for justice and peace, the WCC works not only with member churches but also with partners such as the World Association for Christian Communication, in the struggle for human rights (including communication rights), gender justice, economic and climate justice, addressing the plights of children, migrants, the stateless, and other marginalized persons, and urging peacebuilding in areas of conflict.

### **Encouraging participation in peacebuilding**

Keeping hope alive in troubled times often means communicating so as to engender participation in movements for social change, as well as to learn from the example of inspiring, committed disciples.

Through the “Global Day of Prayer to End Famine,” on 21 May 2017, the WCC Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance partnered with the All Africa Conference of Churches and 120 other organizations to raise the issue of world hunger and enlist churches and religious groups and individuals to tackle it. An accompanying resource pack included liturgical resources, prayers, photos, and songs to be used in faith congregations worldwide. The effort generated between 44 and 70 million impressions on Twitter alone, and the day of prayer was repeated in 2018, with more partners joining.

“12 Faces of Hope,” another such communication initiative for peace, was launched in Geneva during 2017. That year marked of 50 years of Israeli occupation in Palestine. Allied to the WCC social media campaign “Seek #JusticeAndPeace in the Holy Land,” the exhibit features compelling images of – and strong and touching expressions of hope for justice and peace from – a dozen Palestinians and Israelis who all are victims of the occupation. The exhibit, which has since travelled to other sites, also features “50 Moments of Justice and Peace,” moving quotes related to the history of the Holy Land.

Extensive communications support was given to the peace campaign marking the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War.

### **Sharing life in the fellowship**

In its work highlighting critical issues and events, the WCC prioritizes sharing stories on what the churches are doing.

These have included stories how the Korean Christian Federation Central Committee (North Korea) and the National Council of Churches in Korea (South Korea) have addressed rising

tensions in the region, composing their annual joint prayer for the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula for 2019. Other peace-making areas of WCC work have included Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

In addressing sexual and gender-based violence, the WCC has shared the inspiring stories and efforts of individuals and churches all around the world to overcome attitudes and practices that contribute to rape and violence, from “Thursdays in Black Ambassadors” to churches leading public marches to call for an end to gender-based violence.

In all its communication, it is also vital to maintain the council’s credibility with reliable messaging. Media training of staff and communication planning with programmes help ensure stories and messages convey key information and achievements.

### **An ecumenical window**

The WCC employs a variety of media and channels to communicate with the fellowship and the wider world. These include interactive social media; news and information releases on the WCC website and distributed to media and the public; an accessible, professional photo gallery; posted documentation from the WCC, its fellowship of churches and ecumenical partners; book and journal publications that offer in-depth analysis and stimulate theological reflection, and a variety of printed introductory materials about the WCC and the ecumenical movement for distribution at the Ecumenical Centre and meetings and exhibits.

Of special significance is the renewal and relaunch of the WCC website. After more than 3 years’ work on the project, the new WCC website was launched in October 2020. The website is a digital communication hub for the WCC’s multilingual fellowship. It inspires and encourages the member churches to work together and showcases what the churches are doing together on national, regional and global levels. The WCC website serves also as a “hotline” for media, increasing the fellowship’s exposure in media across the world. The overall strategic goal of the WCC website is to be an “ecumenical window” providing insight, as well as the latest news and developments in the ecumenical movement. The website also offers resources for ecumenical engagement and facilitates access to the vast documentation about the ecumenical movement and its involvement in a variety of topics.

### **Publications and Journals**

Part of the WCC’s global outreach comes through its publications. The WCC’s book publishing programme, WCC Publications, facilitates global Christianity’s theological conversation, leverages the insights of its programmatic activities, and enhances the larger visibility and cultural presence of the ecumenical movement, publishing about 20 commercial titles each year. The WCC also publishes three internationally respected journals – *The Ecumenical Review* (recently marking its 70th year), *International Review of Mission* (first published in 1912, now approaching 110 years), and *Current Dialogue* (originally published in 1981) – which are published in partnership with the Oxford-based journals publisher Wiley. Gauged by institutional reach and downloads, the journals ably reach their academic and ecclesial readerships.

### **Keeping alive the ecumenical memory**

The WCC Archives and Library form the institutional and historical memory of the World Council of Churches and the modern ecumenical movement, ensuring long-term access to this unique and invaluable documentary resource and ecumenical heritage. In 2018, the WCC unveiled a new digital archive that now offers online access to various digitized collections such as WCC Assembly reports, WCC central and executive committee reports and minutes, the Faith and Order Papers,



reports and papers from the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and the International Missionary Council, and Interreligious Dialogue, with other collections planned.

### **Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic**

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, online communication took on major importance instead of person-to-person meetings, gatherings, and events. WCC communications as worked closely with programmes to facilitate online events and meetings, and to produce webinars and webcasts. Prayers and spiritual resources on the web and in social media, as well as interviews with church leaders and pastors, and information about good practices have been particularly appreciated in the fellowship. In particular, WCC communication has

- Created a webpage with all the latest and most authoritative information on the pandemic and advice for churches, available in English, French, German, Spanish, and Arabic
- Produced a webcast to share essential information about the virus and the pandemic from authoritative medical personnel in the WCC and WHO
- Organized a joint campaign with the Thursdays in Black Ambassadors, warning of potential problems caused by social isolation, including spousal and child abuse
- Created a webinar, attended by 1200 viewers, in which churches and church professionals from many regions and confessions exchanged perspectives and best practices on online ministry and how to handle the ecclesial and practical challenges posed by the pandemic
- Published a collection of previously published articles on health and hope in a special combined journal edition
- Made available the expertise of the COVID-19 Support Team, consisting of nine key medically trained and pastoral staff to advise churches on measures they can take to reframe their gatherings, liturgies, programming, and pastoral care for those affected by the virus.

In September 2021, the WCC and the Word Association for Christian Communication organized a symposium on “Communication for Social Justice in a Digital Age,” together with co-organizers Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World), Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Evangelical Church in Germany), Evangelische Mission Weltweit (EMW, Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany), and World Student Christian Federation.

In a draft “Manifesto for Communication for Social Justice in a Digital Age,” participants collectively offered a view of the current global context, a look at issues and challenges, and principles to promote socially just communication and called for a “transformative movement” founded on human rights, human dignity, and democratic principles.

This symposium is a step in WCC’s continuing journey to equip the fellowship to address the challenges of a digital era.

## Interviews

### **Rev. Rex R.B. Reyes, Jr: In Philippines, WCC Known for Vital Solidarity**

For Rev. Rex R.B. Reyes, Jr, a bishop of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines, the World Council of Churches creates a connection to the world, even through the most difficult of times.

“From my experience in my country, the solidarity of the WCC is the most significant one that we have. That’s how the WCC is known in my country,” said Reyes, who serves on the WCC executive committee.

The WCC’s work in the Philippines began in response to terrible violations of human rights, Reyes recalled. “The WCC responded to our request from the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, where I was working at the time, and we requested a pastoral delegation team,” he said. “And the WCC organized that team - and they were just an awesome team - that came to the Philippines, drawn from around the world, to look into the violations of human rights.”

This led to the Philippines eventually participating in the Human Rights Council and being included in its Universal Periodic Review.

In 2019, a WCC Pilgrim Team visited the Philippines, and WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit also expressed in November 2019 alarm and grave concern over the listing of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, along with 17 other civil society organizations, as being fronts for the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army.

“Those are some of the critical areas where the World Council of Churches is made known in my country,” said Reyes. “The ecumenical movement really shows the nature of the worldwide movement of Christians in terms of being a community and a people for others.”

Reyes said serving on the executive committee allows him to meet friends and stay connected. “It’s important in a world that is becoming less and less hospitable,” he said. “It is important to form and continue to sustain a community of people, links around the world for mutual prayer, mutual support and encouragement at very difficult times like this. It’s really an honour to be part of conversations that shape and reshape the ecumenical movement.”

Member churches in the Philippines

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/asia/philippines>

### **Rev Dr Angelique Walker-Smith: Grateful for Accompaniment of the WCC**

*Rev. Dr Angelique Walker-Smith, a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) central committee, is senior associate for Pan African and Orthodox Church Engagement at Bread for the World in Washington, DC, and ecumenical representative of the National Baptist Convention USA.*

**You have been involved in the WCC for many years. As a member of the central committee, what do you regard as the most important achievement since the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan?**

**Walker-Smith:** If you are asking about the ecumenical movement’s achievement, I would simply say we have progressed and have more accountability in the fellowship, and more accountability in terms of how we develop our programmes and our vision for the future of the WCC. We have more intersectionality with other agencies and groups to bring more unity in terms of how we talk

to each other. I think this is a very hopeful sign. And we have deepened our relationships with churches that have not been members of the WCC but have been involved in the fellowship, for example our Pentecostal friends, our Catholic friends, and other churches that are coming in this season.

**How important is the prophetic voice of the WCC?**

**Walker-Smith:** I think the prophetic voice is very important, but I don't want to leave out the priestly and also the pastoral care of the ecumenical family. I think there's a deep intersectionality there: when we speak of ecclesiology, we also speak of the prophetic. We also speak of the life and work. So, I think it is important that we speak about the coherence of the ecumenical movement.

**What role is the WCC playing in your part of the world?**

**Walker-Smith:** The WCC already is playing a very important part. Most recently we've been very grateful for the accompaniment of the WCC relative to issues around racism and our indigenous family as well. This year has been, since 1619, the 400th year in which we remember certainly my ancestors. But I think of all of our ancestors who came across the Atlantic from Angola, and the British interceded and we had our first British colony of those who were enslaved. The WCC has been there for us: the general secretary, the moderator, the documents. And we see even this energy going forward globally, as well as for the assembly.

**We are preparing for the 11th WCC Assembly in Germany. How do you prepare your church to be present at the assembly?**

**Walker-Smith:** I am very happy about it! We have identified our delegates and we are finding that the other churches are finding their delegates, so now we will reconfigure and redefine the movement forward over the next year or two.

**Metropolitan Nicholovos: WCC Brings Together Prophetic Voices from Different Parts of the World**

*His Eminence Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Nicholovos, of the Northeast American Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, is a member of the World Council of Churches executive committee.*

**What you are most proud of as you serve on the Executive Committee?**

**Metropolitan Nicholovos:** I am awed by the magnitude of the work the WCC does. From an Indian perspective and from an Orthodox perspective, this is the only body that brings all of us together: the Protestants and the Orthodox, all the different kinds. Even though the Roman Catholics are not members of the WCC, they come and involve themselves in many of our activities.

As members of the executive committee, we guide and we make sure that things move smoothly in the council.

**How important is the prophetic voice in the council?**

**Metropolitan Nicholovos:** The WCC is able to bring perspectives, whether it is racial justice, economic justice or ecological justice, at a different level when the local churches are not able to act on their own. The WCC is able to unite them to joined action. Our actions will never become isolated in one small corner of the earth. The WCC in that sense brings all those prophetic voices from different parts of the world into one platform. That's a great achievement for the WCC.

**Could you give us a concrete example?**

**Metropolitan Nicholovos:** One example from my own perceive is how the WCC is involved in the racial justice issues in America. So, they cooperate very well with the National Council of Churches, and the black churches, and people of colour. Similarly, in Africa and Asia we get involved in the ecological issues and the climate justice issues. WCC is able to get involved and provide some leadership in those contexts.

**How are you preparing yourself for the 11th WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe?**

**Metropolitan Nicholovos:** Every assembly is also a turning point for the WCC. I will start reading materials and training our own people - the delegates - how to prepare themselves and get the reading material and the Bible studies going early enough so that when they come to Karlsruhe they will be prepared to participate fully in those meetings.

## Insights from the fellowship

*“Peace is possible. Peace doesn’t need weapons, wars and more armament. Peace will come by trust, solidarity, by courage to take notice of injustice and violence. Step by step, peace is a path, a process. People, as well as states, are able to implement peace in laws and regulations.”*

—**Rev. Sabine Müller-Langsdorf**, Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN), WCC blog April 2019.<sup>10</sup>

*“In this love we discover that there is no “other” there is only love manifested and waiting to be known. We are invited into communities that are transformed and are agents of transformation by the power of this love. This is a love that we celebrate that is more enduring than cards and candy and flowers and perishable trinkets. This is a love that heals the hurts of our lives and this world.”*

—**Rev. Robina Marie Winbush**, Presbyterian Church (USA), in a WCC blog February 2019, shortly before her untimely death on 12 March 2019.<sup>11</sup>

*“It is not surprising that women here are afraid: scared of how they will feed their families, afraid of being robbed, frightened of the threat of rape or worse, and terrified that the same fate will befall their children. South Sudan is not a safe environment for women. But still their faith, strength and determination shine through. It is good that we came.”*

—**Maureen Jack**, Church of Scotland, WCC blog May 2018.<sup>12</sup>

*“One Sunday when the invitation was extended, a number of persons stood up to accept greetings and blessings. One middle aged woman stood up after the song and said, ‘Today is my anniversary. Twenty-five years. Twenty-five very sad years.’ The silence was deafening. Only slowly did we respond. Her situation was never improved. The violence done, infidelity and abandonment remained part of her reality during his lifetime. Her solace came only after illness led to his death.”*

—**Jennifer P. Martin**, United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands Martin serves on the WCC Commission for World Mission and Evangelism and as co-moderator of the international reference group for the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, WCC blog February 2019.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/peace-is-a-process>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/love-the-very-essence-of-god-in-our-midst>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/south-sudan-the-wounds>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/love-cannot-come-with-harm-and-destruction>

## Milestones in the Journey of the WCC's Governing Bodies from Busan to Karlsruhe

### *(1) The journey step by step*

- Busan, Republic of North Korea, Sixty-First Meeting of the Central Committee, 7-8 November 2013
- Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, Switzerland, Sixty-Second Meeting of the Central Committee, 2-9 July 2014
- Paralimni, Cyprus, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 21-26 November 2014
- Etchmiadzin, Armenia, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8-13 June 2015
- Helsinki, Finland, Meeting of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration, 3-7 October 2015
- Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 13-18 November 2015
- Trondheim, Norway, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 20-21 June 2016
- Trondheim, Norway, Sixty-Third Meeting of the Central Committee, 22-28 June 2016
- Shanghai and Nanjing, People's Republic of China, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 17-23 November 2016
- Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7-12 June 2017
- Rhodes, Greece, Meeting of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration, 2-6 October 2017
- Amman, Jordan, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 17-23 November 2017
- Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland, Assembly Planning Committee, 1-6 February 2018
- Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Meeting of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration, 6-10 May 2018
- Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 13-14 and evening of 18 June 2018
- Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, Switzerland, Sixty-Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee, 15-21 June 2018
- Uppsala, Sweden, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 1-8 November 2018
- Paralimni, Cyprus, Assembly Planning Committee, 9-16 January 2019
- Balamand, Lebanon, Meeting of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration, 5-10 April 2019
- Helsinki, Finland, Meeting of the Search Committee, 8-12 July 2019
- Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland, Executive Committee, 22-28 May 2019
- Athens, Greece, Meeting of the Search Committee, 28 October-1 November 2019
- Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 20-26 November 2019
- Karlsruhe, Germany, Assembly Planning Committee, 2-9 December 2019
- Amsterdam, Netherlands, Meeting of the Search Committee, January 2020
- Kartause Ittingen, Switzerland, Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration, 25 February-3 March 2020
- Video conference, Assembly Planning Committee, 22-25 September 2020
- Video conference, Assembly Planning Committee, 23-25 March 2021
- Video conference, Assembly Planning Committee, 11 May 2021

- Video conference, Executive Committee, 1-3 June 2020
- Video conference, Executive Committee, 20-24 July 2020
- Video conference, Executive Committee, 9-13 November 2020
- Video conference, Executive Committee, 5-17 February 2021
- Video conference, Executive Committee, 17-20 and 25 May 2021
- Video conference, Sixty-Fifth Meeting of the Central Committee, 23-29 June 2021
- Video conference, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 15 July 2021
- Video conference, Assembly Planning Committee, 19-21 October 2021
- Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 12-17 November 2021
- , Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration, 20, 21 and 24 January 2022
- Video conference, Meeting of the Executive Committee, 8 February 2022
- Video conference, Sixty-Sixth Meeting of the Central Committee, 9-15 February 2022

### ***(2) Strengthening the Fellowship – Encounter with member churches***

- Listening to the voice of Churches in the Middle East and in Cyprus. Visiting H.B. Chrysostomos, Archbishop of Cyprus (Executive Committee, November 2014)
- Listening to the voice of the Church in Armenia. Visiting H.H. Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II (Executive Committee, June 2015)
- Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace – Listening to the voices from different constituencies: Indigenous Peoples, Climate Justice, Europe and Migrants, Black Lives Matter (Plenary, Central Committee, June 2016)
- Listening to the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (Executive Committee, November 2016)
- Visit of the Leadership of the Central Committee to Beijing, China. Visiting church and government authorities (Executive Committee, November 2016)
- Listening to H.B. Patriarch Theophilos of the Holy City of Jerusalem, All Palestine and Jordan. Meeting representatives of member churches in Jordan. Visiting His Majesty King Abdallah II (Executive Committee, November 2017)
- Celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the WCC at St Peter’s Cathedral in Geneva, together with the leadership of the Protestant Church of Geneva and H.A.H. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who delivered the homily of the day (Central Committee, June 2018)

### ***(3) Nurturing the fellowship – Listening to one another, reflecting together***

- Unity of the Churches: Solidarity with One Another in Conflict Situations (Plenary, Central Committee, July 2014)
- Climate Change (Plenary, Central Committee, July 2014)
- Economic Justice (Plenary, Central Committee, July 2014)
- Ecumenical Solidarity with One Another in Sharing Resources (Plenary, Central Committee, July 2014)
- Unity (Plenary, Central Committee, June 2016)
- Middle East (Plenary, Central Committee, June 2016)
- Religion and Violence (Plenary, Central Committee, June 2016)
- Breaking barriers: The Search for Unity Today (Anniversary plenary, Central Committee June 2018)
- Ecumenical Diakonia and Sustainable Development (Anniversary plenary, Central Committee June 2018)

- Experiences from the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (Anniversary Plenary, Central Committee, June 2018)
- The Living Fellowship (Anniversary Plenary, Central Committee, June 2018)
- “Walking together, praying together, working together”, Visit of H.H. Pope Francis to the WCC at the occasion of its 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (Central Committee, June 2018)

#### ***(4) Cooperation with Ecumenical and International Partners***

- Memorandum with UNICEF – Churches Engaging for Children in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (Executive Committee, November 2015)
- Joint statement by WCC, UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund and UNHCR, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, entitled “Europe’s Response to the Refugee Crisis, From Origin to Transit, Reception and Refuge, A Call for Shared Responsibility and Coordinated Action,” following the WCC/UN high level conference on the refugee crisis in Europe, at the Ecumenical Centre Geneva on 18-19 January. (January 2016)
- The Global Christian Forum – A proposal for a structure (Executive Committee, November 2017)
- Ecumenical Global Health Strategy (Central Committee, June 2018)
- WCC and ACT Alliance Joint Day on Ecumenical Diakonia and Sustainable Development (Executive Committee, November 2018)

#### ***(5) Contribution to ecumenical formation***

- Stewards programme (Central Committee, July 2014)
- Stewards programme (Central Committee, June 2016)
- Meeting the professors and students of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (Executive Committee, November 2016)
- *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World – A Christian Perspective* (Executive Committee, November 2017)
- Stewards programme (World Mission Conference, Arusha, Tanzania, March 2018)
- Stewards programme (Central Committee, June 2018)
- Bossey master students serving as stewards with active participation in the spiritual life of the meeting (Central Committee, February 2022)

#### ***(6) Decisions taken***

- Election of the Moderators. Election of the Executive Committee (Central Committee, November 2013)
- Initiating and monitoring the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace
- Monitoring the Green Village Real Estate Development Project
- Preparation of the 11th Assembly of the WCC (selection of venue; theme; style, participation, pre-assembly events, spiritual life, programme, budget, etc.)
- The United Protestant Church of France, the Union of Protestant Churches in Alsace and Lorraine and the Uniting Church of Sweden are accepted as members of the WCC fellowship (Central Committee, July 2014)
- Election of the members of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration (Central Committee, July 2014)
- Approval of the WCC Strategic Plan 2014-2017 (Central Committee, July 2014)
- Revision of the By-laws of Consultative Bodies (Central Committee, July 2014)



- Election of the leadership of Consultative Bodies (F&O, CWMW, CCIA, CEF, ECHS, JWG between the WCC and the RCC, JCC between the WCC and Pentecostal Churches) (Central Committee, July 2014)
- Integration of WCC–Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (Executive Committee, June 2015)
- Appointment of the new Director of Faith and Order (Executive Committee, June 2015)
- Election of Deputy General Secretaries (Central Committee, June 2016)
- Mid-term election of the executive committee (Central Committee, June 2016)
- Election of the Assembly Planning Committee (Central Committee, June 2016)
- Re-admission of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa as a full member church (Central Committee, June 2016)
- Celebration of the 70th anniversary of the WCC (various events throughout the year 2018, with culmination point the Central Committee meeting in June 2018)
- Reception of the Report of the World Mission Conference held in Arusha, Tanzania, 8-13 March 2018, and the “Arusha Call to Discipleship” (Central Committee, June 2018)
- The Africa Brotherhood Church (Kenya) and the Community of Baptist Churches in Central Africa (DRC) (Central Committee 2016; Central Committee 2018) are accepted as members of the WCC fellowship
- Reception of the Mid-term Evaluation Report (Central Committee, June 2018)
- Approval of the WCC Strategic Plans for the Period 2018-2021 (Central Committee, June 2018)
- Election of the Search Committee for the election of a General Secretary (Central Committee, June 2018)
- Approval of the proposal of the Commission on Faith and Order to organize the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order
- The applications of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa and the First African Church Mission for membership in the WCC are accepted, according to Rule I.6. for an interim period, until the next meeting of the Central Committee in February 2022. (Central Committee, June 2021)
- The continued membership of the Province of the Episcopal Church of Sudan and the Province of the Episcopal Church of the South Sudan as two member churches is recognized, after the change in structure leading to the creation of two independent provinces (Central Committee, June 2021)
- The decision of the Cook Islands Christian Church to resign its membership in the WCC is received with regret (Central Committee, June 2021)
- The Church of Jesus Christ on the Earth by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu (Kimbanguist Church) is no longer to be considered a member church of the WCC.
- Approval of the 11th Assembly Programme (Central Committee, June 2021)
- International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and Amity Foundation are recognized as Specialized Ministries in a working relationship with the WCC (Central Committee, June 2021)
- Approval of member churches delegations to the 11th Assembly (Central Committee, June 2021, Central Committee, February 2022)
- Nomination of additional delegates to the 11th Assembly (Central Committee, June 2021, Central Committee, February 2022)
- Approval of the WCC Strategic Plan, 2013-2021, Addendum 2022 (Central Committee, June 2021)
- Approval of the WCC Communication Strategy 2013-2021, Addendum 2022 (Central Committee, June 2021)

- Approval of the WCC Finance Strategy 2013-2021, Addendum 2022 (Central Committee, June 2021)
- Approval of the reconfiguration of WCC programmatic work on health and healing (Central Committee, February 2022)
- Establishment of a new Commission of the Churches on Health and Healing; provisional approval of the by-laws of the newly established Commission (Central Committee, February 2022)
- Provisional approval of the revised by-laws of the Commission on Youth, including the new name “Young People in the Ecumenical Movement Commission (YPEM)” Central Committee, February 2022)
- The First African Church Mission (Nigeria) is received as a new member church of the WCC (Central Committee, February 2022)
- The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa is received as a new member church of the WCC (Central Committee, February 2022)
- The continued membership of the Anglican Province of Alexandria as a member church of the WCC that has experienced a change in structure is recognized (Central Committee, February 2022)
- Nomination of the leadership of assembly committees (Central Committee, February 2022)
- Amendments to the WCC Rules and the Supplement to the WCC Rules, with particular attention to new ways of meetings of governing bodies by electronic communication (Central Committee, February 2022)

#### ***(7) Documents processed***

- ***An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.*** A call to member churches and ecumenical partners to walk together in a common quest, renewing their vocation of the church through collaborative engagement with the most important issues of justice and peace, healing a world filled with conflict, injustice, and pain (Central Committee, July 2014)
- ***Who do we say that we are? Christian Identity in a Multi-religious World.*** Received by the Central Committee and sent, together with a study guide, to member churches and ecumenical partners for further study, reflection, and discussion (Central Committee, July 2014)
- ***The Gift of Being – Called to be a Church of All and for All.*** A document prepared by EDAN, in close communication with the Faith and Order Commission and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. Adopted by the Central Committee and commended to member churches for further study (Central Committee, July 2016)
- ***Churches Commitment to Children.*** An open invitation to WCC member churches and ecumenical partners. (Executive Committee, November 2016)
- ***Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World – A Christian Perspective*** (Executive Committee, November 2017)
- ***WCC Code of Ethical Conduct*** (Executive Committee, November 2017)
- ***Ecumenical Global Health Strategy.*** a strategy through which WCC and its member churches will seek to continue the Lord’s healing ministry (Central Committee, June 2018)
- ***Pilgrims on the Path of Peace – The Journey of the WCC from Busan to Karlsruhe.*** Report of the Central Committee to the Assembly, 2013-2022 (Executive Committee, November 2021, Central Committee, February 2022)

- *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way: Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality – A Resource for Reflection and Action.* (Central Committee, February 2022)
- *Called to Transformation - Ecumenical Diakonia. Resource Document* (Central Committee, February 2022)
- *Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia resource document Addendum* (Central Committee, February 2022)
- *Report of the Joint Working Group between the RCC and the WCC.* (Central Committee, February 2022)
- *A Vision of Digital Justice: A New Communications Paper for the 21st Century* for presentation to the WCC 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Karlsruhe. (Central Committee, February 2022)
- *Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity - Draft 11<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly Unity Statement,* (Central Committee, February 2022)

#### ***(8) Strategies and Policies Approved***

- Income Development Strategy 2014-2017 (Central Committee, July 2014)
- Financial Strategy 2014-2017 (Central Committee, July 2014)
- General Reserves Policy (Central Committee, July 2014)
- Policy for reimbursement of travel costs for WCC governing, consultative and advisory bodies (Executive Committee, November 2014)
- Policy for screening New Funding Partners (Executive Committee, November 2015)
- Integrated Policy for the Ecumenical Institute at the Château de Bossey (Executive Committee, November 2015)
- Financial Strategy 2018-2021, including the Income Development Strategy 2018-2021 (Central Committee, July 2014)
- WCC Child Safeguarding Policy (Central Committee, June 2018)
- Revised General Reserves Policy (Central Committee, June 2018)
- Building Reserves Policy (Central Committee, June 2018)
- WCC Gender Justice Principles (Central Committee, February 2022)

#### ***(9) Public statements issued***

##### **Africa**

- **Minute on South Sudan**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, condemning the acts of violence and the political crisis which have erupted in South Sudan since 15 December 2013. (Executive Committee, February 2014).
- Joint statement by WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches, expressing grave concern for the people of **Burundi** in a situation of extreme tension and escalating human rights violations. (December 2015)
- **Minute on the situation in Zimbabwe**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, following political developments culminating in the resignation of President Robert Mugabe after 37 years in power, affirming the call of the churches of Zimbabwe for calm and peace, for respect for human dignity and rule of law, for a transitional government of national unity to oversee the transition towards free, fair, and credible elections and for an inclusive process of national dialogue. (Executive Committee, November 2017)
- Statement by WCC general secretary condemning an attack by gunmen during New Year's Day service at the Rivers Church in Omuku town, southern **Nigeria**, killing at least 16 people, and calling to pursue peace and justice for all, dignity for all and the freedom to worship safely for all. (January 2018)

## Asia-Pacific

- **Minute on election in Myanmar**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, welcoming the peaceful election process recently concluded, and expressing regret that the Muslim Rohingya and other minority communities continue to be denied recognition as citizens, calling on the newly elected government to ensure respect for the human rights of all people in Myanmar. (Executive Committee, November 2015)
- **Statement on the detention of Bishop Carlos Morales, and the situation in Mindanao, the Philippines**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, calling for the release of Bishop Morales from detention, and further calling for the lifting of martial law in Mindanao, as well as the release of all political prisoners in the Philippines. (Executive Committee, November 2017)
- **Statement on the situation on the Korean Peninsula, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, appealing to all parties in the confrontation** on the Korean peninsula to step back from the brink of war, to seek human encounter and dialogue without political preconditions, and to be true instruments of peace. (Executive Committee, November 2017)

## Europe

- Statement by the WCC general secretary, condemning the **24 May attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels, Belgium**, which resulted in the deaths of four persons including two Israeli citizens. (May 2014)
- **Statement on terrorist attacks in Paris and Beirut**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, stating that “We cannot and do not accept that such a terrorist atrocity can ever be justified in the name of God or of any religion. Violence in the name of religion is violence against religion.” (Executive Committee, November 2015)
- Statement by WCC general secretary hailing the **historic meeting of Pope Francis, pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church and Patriarch Kirill, primate of the Russian Orthodox Church**, and celebrating it as a great step forward in healing the schism between Western and Eastern Christianity. (February 2016)

## Latin America and the Caribbean

- **Statement on the Amazon under Threat**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, urging the Congress and Government of Brazil to withdraw the regressive and destructive initiatives to abolish existing environmental protections in the Amazon Basin in order to open those areas to extractive industries and commercial exploitation. (Executive Committee, November 2017)

## Middle East

- Statement by the WCC general secretary, expressing grave concern about the law passed by the Israeli Knesset, which would define the **status of Palestinian Arab Christians in the state of Israel**. The law introduces a distinction between Christian and Muslim Palestinians and states that Christian Palestinians are Christians and not Palestinians. (March 2014)
- **Statement on situation in Israel and Palestine**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, expressing again “the WCC’s rejection of violence and injustice” and reiterating “its frequent call for respect for human rights for all people of the region,

regardless of their national, ethnic or religious identity.” (Executive Committee, November 2015)

- Statement by WCC general secretary on the **Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities**, released by hundreds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals from more than 120 countries, along with representatives of Islamic and international organizations, stating that Muslim leaders are showing the way toward a future living together on a shared platform of equal rights, mutual care, and respect. (February 2016)
- Statement by WCC general secretary expressing shock at **air strike that targeted the Kammounh Syrian refugee camp** and urging the international community to put an end to the “culture of impunity” in Syria. (May 2016)
- Statement by WCC general secretary protesting the **detention and abusive treatment at Ben Gurion International Airport**, 29 April – 2 May 2016, of several participants travelling to Israel to attend a meeting in Beit Jala of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change. (May 2016)
- **Statement on the situation in Northern Iraq**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, expressing concerns for sustaining religious diversity and calling on the political leadership of the Federal Government of Iraq and of the Kurdistan Regional Government to engage in dialogue and negotiations to resolve the current crisis, and to avoid any further conflict in a region that has known far too much violence and suffering. (Executive Committee, November 2017)
- **Statement on Jerusalem and the Status Quo**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, expressing concern over the ways in which church institutions and properties in Jerusalem are threatened as a result of contracts of disputed legality, the efforts of radical settler groups, and policies of the government of Israel. (Executive Committee, November 2017)

### Human Rights, Peace and Security

- **Statement on the use of drones and denial of the right to life**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, condemning the use of drones or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) that pose “serious threats to humanity” and the “right to life” while setting “dangerous precedents in inter-state relations.” (Executive Committee, February 2014)
- **Statement on the rights of internally displaced persons**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, expressing strong concerns over the increasing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) throughout the world, and calling on the governments to fulfil their responsibility in providing assistance to IDPs and implementing policies to protect their human rights. (Executive Committee, February 2014)
- Statement by the WCC general secretary on the importance of bringing the world’s new **Arms Trade Treaty** into effect. Five of the world’s major arms exporters are among a group of mostly European countries ratifying the world’s first Arms Trade Treaty on 2 April, a year after the treaty was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. (April 2014)
- Statement by WCC general secretary expressing support for draft resolution on “Ethical Imperatives for a **Nuclear-weapons-free World**” at the United Nations General Assembly in New York. (October 2015)
- Statement delivered by WCC general secretary to the UN Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) taking forward multilateral **nuclear disarmament negotiations**, Geneva, stressing the need for an explicit legal ban. (May 2016)
- **Statement on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and on 2017 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear**

**Weapons**, urging all states to sign, ratify and implement the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. (Executive Committee, November 2017)

- Statement by WCC general secretary strongly condemning extremists who seek to victimize those of other faiths, after the **American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee** expressed outrage at fliers encouraging people to take part in "Punish a Muslim Day", which originated in London. (April 2018)

#### **Economic Justice, Climate Justice, and Health and Healing**

- **Statement on UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, December 2015**, adopted by the WCC Executive Committee, expressing hope that the event will achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C. (Executive Committee, November 2015)

## Financial Stewardship 2013 to 2021

### Milestones along the way

Following the Busan assembly, the central committee approved a WCC financial strategy for 2014 to 2017; and then for 2018 to 2021, with an integrated income development strategy. The finances stayed on course, with a remarkable period of stability in contributions income over six years, between 2015 and 2019. Throughout these years, there were no programme deficits, with annual programme expenditure being covered by income or available balances.

The Green Village project was launched, and sales of land-shares for the apartment building realized net proceeds of CHF 13 million (after tax provisions) in 2019 and 2020. In 2020, CHF 12 million was used to reimburse half of the loan of CHF 24 million, contracted in 2012 to refinance the pension fund.

In 2020, the WCC reached its general reserve target of CHF 7 million, increased from CHF 5.7 million in 2013.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, had an impact on finance. The hotel and conference centre at the Château de Bossey was closed for several months, and, unavoidably, staff positions on site had to be reduced to the minimum required to deliver services for the continuity of the the Ecumenical Institute. As far as the WCC in general was concerned, there were reductions in contributions income, or funding contracts postponed, when certain activities could not take place as planned. However, the adaptation to on-line work, with delivery of webinars and other on-line productions, allowed work to continue productively, creatively and in a cost-efficient way. In 2020 and in 2021, membership contributions not applied for programme activities as planned could be reallocated to the assembly fund.

### Contributions income trends

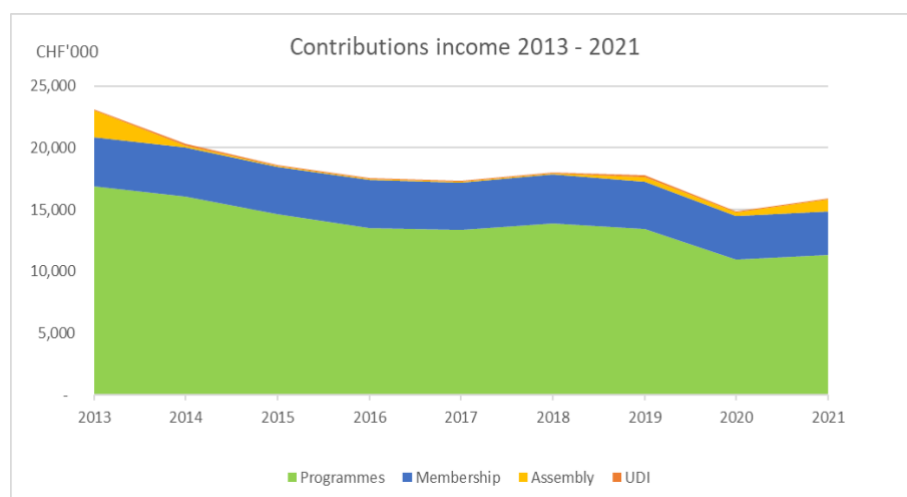


Figure 1 Contribution Income

In 2014, the year following the Busan assembly, contributions income totalled CHF 20.4 million. In 2015, however, the Swiss franc strengthened against the euro, with dramatic impact. The WCC reported CHF 18.6 million in contributions in 2015; however, if those contributions had been recorded at the average exchange rate obtained in 2014, their value would have been CHF 20.1 million.

Nevertheless, there was period of remarkable stability in contributions income from 2015 to 2019, with total contributions income averaging CHF 17.7 million (Figure 1).

In 2020 and 2021, however, as a result of the pandemic, certain activities were postponed, and in particular the usual activities of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel could not be conducted. This led to a decrease in the level of contributions income.

Between 2013 and 2021, membership contributions ranged between CHF 4 million and CHF 3.5 million annually. During this period, 2019 was the year in which the largest number of member churches, 209, contributed, but the number then decreased to 156 in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. In 2021, the number of member churches contributing has increased once again, with 187 contributing by the end of February 2022.

### Programme expenditure

During this period, programme expenditure was planned, monitored, and managed in relation to contributions income.

With one exception across the years 2013 to 2021, programme expenditure by category (see Figure 2) reflects the same trend as contributions income over the period. In 2018, programme expenditure exceeded available contributions income. In that year, the WCC celebrated its 70th anniversary, with a number of celebratory events. General reserves were drawn upon, with advance approval, to cover expenditure.

From 2013 to 2019, staff costs represented typically 45 percent of total programme expenditure, and infrastructure costs about 12 percent. In 2020 and 2021, as a result of the impact of the pandemic, while staff costs and infrastructure costs remained rather steady in absolute terms, their relative percentages in relation to total programme expenditure increased to 55 percent and 16 percent respectively, because of lower levels of income and expenditure.

Annual infrastructure charged to programmes decreased by about CHF 1.3 million (or 35 percent) between 2013 and 2021. This result was achieved principally by merging the IT and facility services team and allocating staff time in the finance team to management of rental activities in the Ecumenical Centre.

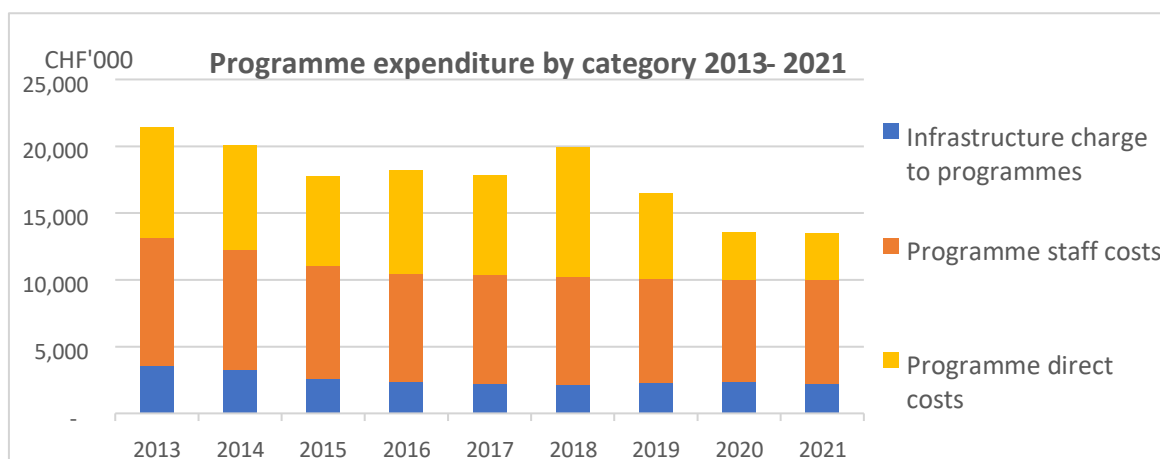


Figure 2 Programme Expenditure by Category



The pie chart (Figure 3) shows the proportionate share of total programme expenditure between the programmes, including the transversal issues. The shares range between 22 percent (CHF 4 million) for Public Witness, and 9 percent (CHF 1.6 million) for transversal issues on average, annually.

The costs of governing body meetings are included in the general secretariat share of programme expenditure which fluctuates in those years when the central committee met in person. The central committee costs about CHF 0.6 million for such a meeting.

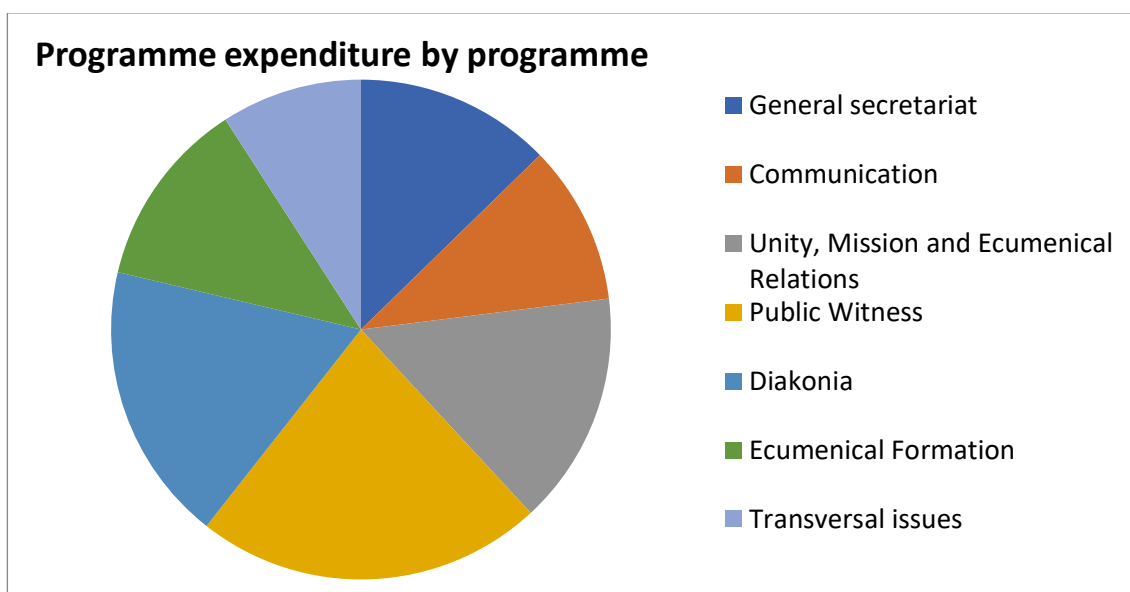


Figure 3 Programme Expenditure by Programme

### Capital expenditure

For the years 2014 to 2021, the central committee set a policy of a rather low level of capital expenditure, with a suggested target of CHF 0.5 million annually, with the objective of maintaining the quality of the WCC properties, without substantial development. Annual budgets approved by executive committee followed the guideline. On average, capital expenditure was about CHF 0.4 million per year.

With depreciation charged at about CHF 1.6 million per year (plus additional depreciation as described below, in the note on year 2018), whenever financial results broke even, a positive cash flow was generated, which was used to address loan reimbursements.

### Land, property and equipment

In accordance with its accounting policies, which require that the cost of buildings and equipment be depreciated over their estimated useful lives, total land, property, and equipment is reported in the WCC's financial statements at CHF 29.1 million in 2021. The WCC owns three buildings: the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, with the ecumenical chapel, the conference centre and offices; the Château de Bossey in the Canton de Vaud, home to the Ecumenical Institute, with its library, and the hotel and conference centre; and a residential building in Grand-Saconnex. Both the Ecumenical Centre and the Château de Bossey are set in extensive grounds, which are also owned by the WCC. The three properties have an insurance value of over CHF 100 million. The land at the Ecumenical Centre is currently under development, with a real estate project named *Green Village*, as outlined in the following section.

## Loans

Loans totalled CHF 48.4 million in 2013, and CHF 32.5 million in 2021 (a total decrease of CHF 15.9 million). The reimbursement of loans of CHF 12 million in 2020 was funded by the land-share sales for the first building in the Green Village project, Montreal, the residential building. Other loan reimbursements of CHF 3.9 million were funded by proceeds from rental at the Ecumenical Centre, from hotel activities at the Château de Bossey, and from the rental income from the residential building.

## Liquidity

The WCC has maintained a high level of liquidity from 2013 to 2021. In 2013, cash and cash equivalents were reported at CHF 10.9 million, closing in 2020 at CHF 14.3 million. During this period, about CHF 8 million on average was invested under a conservative investment management mandate in Swiss francs or was included as the cash portion in a balanced investment management mandate.

## General reserves

General reserves are defined as those funds available to the WCC after meeting its obligations and commitments, without realizing fixed assets.

From 2013 to 2017, the general reserves target fluctuated slightly, being defined as 50 percent of staff costs. In 2018, central committee determined that the general reserves target would be set at CHF 7 million.

The general reserves closed at CHF 7 million in 2020, having opened in 2013 at CHF 5.7 million.

<b>General reserves 2013-2020</b>	CHF 000	
Opening position 1 January 2013	5,710	
Net operating deficits covered	(454)	
From designated fund for fixed assets	5,207	as a result of low capital expenditure
Total funds available in the period	<b>10,463</b>	after covering obligations, and without recourse to fixed assets
Allocations from general reserves, as approved by executive committee:		
To the assembly fund	(1,453)	
To the programme funds	(1,210)	principally to cover the cost of governance meetings
To the fund for the building project, net	(800)	to cover interest on the pension fund loan, and professional fees for the project
Closing balance at 31 December 2020	<b>7,000</b>	

## Significant financial developments from 2013 to 2021

**2013** The WCC's 10th Assembly, which took place in Busan, Republic of Korea, 30 October – 8 November 2013, reported total costs of CHF 5.7 million for the period 2010 to 2013. This result was CHF 0.8 million under budget for the four-year period. The cost in 2013 of the assembly itself was CHF 4.9 million. In addition, in 2013 programme expenditure reflected costs of CHF 1.7 million for 67 different activities related to the assembly. The Korean churches generously covered costs related to the venue, ground transport, and local visits, which are not included in the costs above.

**2014** In February 2014, the executive committee launched an enhanced membership contribution plan. For 2014, member churches were requested to continue their financial support at least at the level that applied in 2012. The central committee approved the *WCC Financial Strategy 2014-2017*, to accompany the *WCC Strategic Plan 2014-2017*. The financial strategy set out how the WCC aimed to remain a sustainable organization. Targets and milestones were defined, while the strategy affirmed the values of stewardship and the economy of life.

**2015** In January 2015, the Swiss National Bank abandoned its policy of supporting the Euro, and the Swiss franc/euro rate exchange rate decreased sharply from 1.2, settling at about 1.05. This was 10 percent less than the budgeted rate. For the WCC, the impact of adverse foreign exchange rates on contributions income was about CHF 1.5 million. To address the risks, the general secretary issued a revised budget in April 2015, with a 10 percent reduction in programme expenditure and other measures.

The Bossey hotel and conference centre reported a net surplus in 2015, following focused initiatives to welcome new guests.

The WCC Retirement Fund was removed from the Geneva register in April 2016, formally concluding the liquidation process begun in 2012. Since 2012, the WCC's pension fund provider has been the collective fund *Profond*.

**2016** Contributions income totalled CHF 17.5 million, being 6 percent less than in 2015, and slightly below the budget of CHF 18.1 million. As in prior years in this period, all programmatic work was completed within available income and balances.

General reserves closed at CHF 7 million, above the target of 50 percent of staff costs that had been set by central committee in July 2014.

**2017** The year 2017 marked the completion of the first of two four-year planning periods, shaped by the *WCC strategic plan 2014-2017*, and the accompanying financial strategy. From 2015 to 2017, the WCC's work benefited from three years of relative stability in programme income, at a level close to CHF 18 million. A loan of CHF 24 million had been contracted in 2012, to refinance the pension fund. It came to maturity in 2017 and was renewed on favourable terms.

**2018** In 2018, the central committee approved the *WCC financial strategy 2018-2021* with a steady income scenario for the following four-year planning period. While the WCC would continue to raise funds from UN agencies, governments, and foundations for particular project work in peace-building and social cohesion, member churches and ecumenical partners continue to provide 95 percent of the resources which fund WCC programmes.

Recognizing the fact that the Area Development Plan for Green Village came into effect in January 2018, and that the office wings of the Ecumenical Centre would be demolished in the short-term as a result, additional depreciation was charged at about CHF 0.8 million more than in 2017. The increased annual charge, subject to adjustment over the following years depending on the planned date of demolition, is a noncash item.

**2019** In 2019, the WCC reported a gain on sale of land of CHF 3.5 million, with the sale of the first eight land-shares (out of 49) in the residential building.

The COVID-19 pandemic was declared on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization, and before the finalization of the financial statements for 2019. A note to the financial statements highlighted the economic uncertainties, with anticipated adverse results for the hotel and conference centre at the Château de Bossey; a delay in the marketing of one land plot in Grand-Saconnex; and an adverse impact on foreign exchange gains and losses.

**2020** Contributions income decreased to CHF 14.9 million (compared to CHF 17.8 million in 2019). The decrease was caused mainly by the impact of the pandemic on the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, for which the usual activities could not take place from March 2020 onwards. Other factors causing the decrease were the strengthening of the Swiss franc against the euro and other currencies, and the postponement of certain activities, and the related contributions, to 2021. Several member churches and ecumenical partners increased contributions in 2020, as an expression of solidarity.

Travel and other meeting costs were reduced with the adaptation of plans in favour of on-line webinars and events. As a result, CHF 0.6 million of membership contributions were allocated to the designated fund for the assembly.

The sales for 40 land-shares for all apartments in the residential building were settled in 2020, leaving only the land-share for the crèche to be sold. A gain on the sale of land of CHF 18.9 million was reported. Loans of CHF 12 million were reimbursed from net proceeds.

In October 2020, the tax authorities advised the WCC that its tax exemption status would be withdrawn with effect from 1 January 2020, because proceeds from land sales and other self-generated income would exceed total contributions income. The letter included an invitation to the WCC to reapply for tax exemption status when the period of land sales was completed. Provisions for tax, totalling CHF 2.5 million, were accrued for 2019 and 2020. Programme contributions will not be subject to tax.

**2021** Preliminary results for 2021 reflect the continued impact of the pandemic on contributions. Nevertheless contributions increased to CHF 15.9 million (compared to CHF 14.9 million in 2019), reflecting grants and other income received for the assembly and its preparatory work.

Funds and deferred income held for the assembly totalled about CHF 4.1 million at the end of 2021, while a budget of CHF 10.9 million in total expenditure has been approved for the event in 2022.

## Green Village

The WCC's estate in Grand-Saconnex is under development. Beginning in May 2012, on signature of the development contract with Implenia, the leading Swiss real estate services company, the WCC set out to meet three objectives:

- Reimburse a loan of CHF 24 million which refinanced the pension fund;
- Renovate the Ecumenical Centre, with sufficient office space for the WCC and sister organizations; and
- Own sufficient property to generate a substantial contribution to operating costs.

The estate 34,000 m<sup>2</sup> of land in Grand-Saconnex in the international district, near the airport and the UN, is highly valuable. It is set in the development zone, in the district known as *Jardin des Nations*, where urban planning guidelines specify that property is to be made available in priority for international organizations, NGOs, or national missions to the UN. In stewarding the resource for the future, the WCC steering committee, led by the general secretary, envisaged a cluster of buildings, "like a village," where people would gather, fostering dialogue and exchange, and with sustainability as a hallmark for the project.

In 2013, the local architects *LRS architectes* won the architectural competition, with a design proposing six new buildings grouped around the Ecumenical Centre, set in landscaped gardens. This design offered many advantages, including that of phasing; the project could be launched while the Ecumenical Centre remained operational.

An Area Development Plan, defining the size, volume, and type of buildings, was filed with the authorities in November 2014. It was approved in November 2017, following a process which involved consultation with many cantonal departments, and with the local community – as well as amicable resolution of an opposition raised by an association concerning traffic. The Area Development Plan came into effect in January 2018 and at that date, the Ecumenical Centre main building was also listed as an historic monument by the cantonal heritage department, the chapel being described as "one of the most outstanding specimens of religious architecture in the canton."

This will be a very special project, both conserving the old and preparing for the future. The WCC aims to achieve a renovation that conserves the ecumenical chapel under supervision of the heritage department; and it will do so in the heart of a development with new construction built to high sustainability standards.

### Green Village masterplan, building profiles and estimated delivery dates

Building	Type	GFS* m <sup>2</sup>	Floors	Estimate delivery:
Montreal	Residential	6,010	Ground +8	March 2023
Kyoto	Offices	13,990	Ground +9	Dec 2023
Rio	Hotel	7,840	Ground +7	2025
Lima	Offices	7,935	Ground +6	2026
Stockholm	Offices	9,040	Ground +6	2026
Durban	Offices	12,640	Ground +8	2026/2027

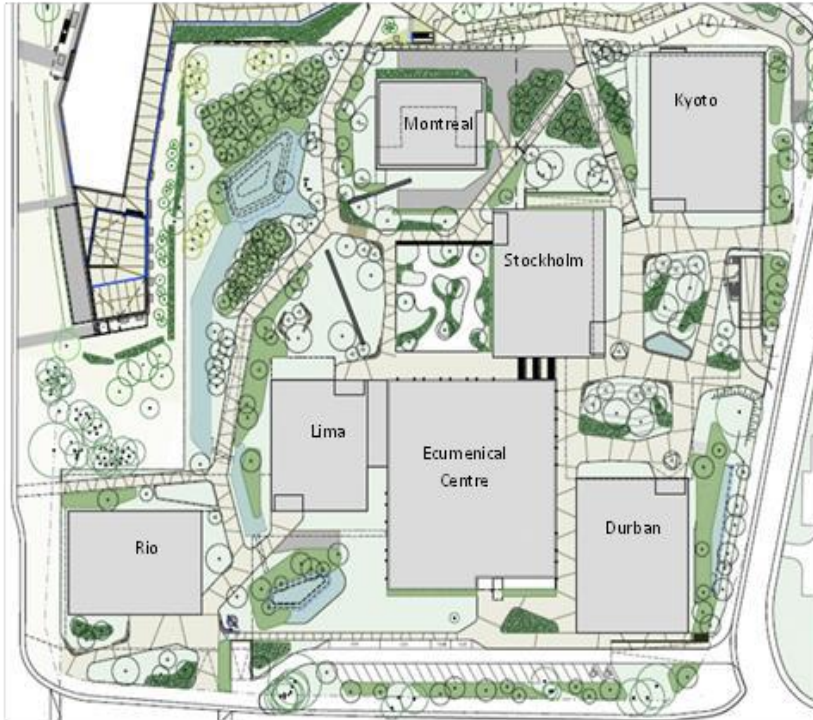


Image 1 Site Map - Green Village

In 2017, studies were underway for the first two building permits, and for the underground car park linking the buildings. The building permit requests were filed with the urban planning department in April 2018 and were delivered in December 2018.

While that work progressed, the WCC defined its strategy, recognizing also that decisions would be made over time, depending on the outcome of each phase. In order to realize capital to meet the first project objectives, the executive committee, following various professional studies, determined in June 2017 that the first office building project would be sold together with its land; and, in November 2017, that the residential building project would also include a sale of land, rather than land lease. In these first strategic steps, the vision has remained that of WCC selling a project, rather than selling a building. Under this vision, the “project” can be defined as the building permit, with its environmental and architectural specifications, within the Green Village master plan.

In the summer of 2017, a landscape architectural competition was launched, with a focus on biodiversity and local materials informing the jury’s selection of the winning project, *Ekoumene*.

In 2017, a heritage study was conducted, proposing an approach to the renovation of the Ecumenical Centre with areas of the building designated for office space; a staircase leading from the lobby to the gallery; segregation of public areas from working areas; and a renovated conference centre.

The steering committee presented the master plan to the central committee in June 2018 and announced that the buildings would be named after the cities which had hosted meetings at which environmental protocols had been defined, honouring international work for the care for creation. The Green Village website was launched. <https://green-village.ch/en/>. Later that year, the target date for the launch of the Kyoto building to market was set at November 2019. The objective was

to lease 50 percent of the office floor space before that date, securing a future income stream before approaching Swiss institutional investors. The land plot in Grand-Saconnex was divided in 2019, defining plots for each of the new buildings, a shared “auxiliary plot”, being an extensive park of about 20,000m<sup>2</sup>, and two narrow contour plots to be ceded to the municipality, for cycle paths and walkways. Each buyer of a land plot would own a proportion of the auxiliary plot, with shared rights and obligations.

At the end of 2019, the Montreal residential building was launched to market. By December 2020, all 48 land-shares for the apartments were sold. From the net gains, a CHF 12 million loan reimbursement was made, and CHF 4 million is held, reserved substantially to meet potential tax liabilities. The construction site opened in March 2020 and is scheduled for completion in early 2023.

The target for 50 percent leases of Kyoto floor space was not met by the end of 2019. With the pandemic, the real estate market for office space suffered in 2020. In that year, and up until summer 2021, Implenia continued work on the underground car park which connects the Kyoto and Montreal buildings, as an integral part of the infrastructure required for delivery of the Montreal building. At the time of publication, following an investor search in autumn 2021, exclusivity has been granted to a Swiss institutional investor interested in acquiring the land and project.

Work continues meanwhile on plans for other Green Village buildings. In July 2021, the building permit request for the Ecumenical Centre renovation was filed with the urban planning department. At a later date, as the project progresses, there will be opportunity to involve member churches and ecumenical partners in contributing to the renovation. In November 2021, following a market study and a legal analysis on the feasibility of land lease, on the recommendation of the steering committee, the executive committee decided that the strategy for the Stockholm building would be sale of the land. The Stockholm project has been presented to potential investors, particularly national missions to the UN and NGOs, interested in acquiring office space to be sold by floor. A building permit request will be prepared in 2022.

Only the member churches can assure the long-term presence of the WCC in Geneva; the life in the ecumenical space depends on the member churches and ecumenical partners. However, with good stewardship of the land, the Green Village project can contribute to that goal.

### **Sustainability**

The WCC, Implenia, the municipality of Grand-Saconnex and the Swiss Association for Sustainable Districts signed an agreement in 2019, with a sustainability action plan following the ten *One Planet Living* principles, defined by WWF International and Bioregional, a UK Association. Actions address a range of commitments, from water management to the sourcing of local food. The *One Planet Living* principles concern not only construction, but also the ongoing life of the district.

The *One Planet Living* plan of action was accepted by all the buyers of the Montreal building. In accepting the plan, they undertook, for example, to use only locally sourced wood for parquet, or kitchen appliances with certified green standards.

An audit of the planning phase of the project was conducted by experts at the Association for Sustainable Districts, to test compliance with the targets in the initial phase, with a favourable outcome in March 2021.

In addition, it is aimed to attain the Swiss sustainability construction certification SNBS, *Standard Nachhaltiges Bauen Schweiz*, for the Kyoto building. A preliminary review in January 2021 has had a favourable outcome.

Geothermal energy is being installed for Montreal and Kyoto, with heat sourced through groundwater, to be used also for cooling in Kyoto. The right of access to use the groundwater is rarely granted; and this will be one of the first private installations of this type in Geneva.

As illustrated, solar panels will be installed on all the buildings, and they will be linked in a micro-grid, sharing the electricity source on the site. This will be one of the first micro-grids in Geneva.

*Extract from the Foreword to the heritage study, 3.11.2017 (slightly edited)*

For the member churches and ecumenical partners of the WCC, the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva is a privileged space, where the fellowship of churches is nurtured and celebrated, where issues of potential discord are addressed in trust and confidence, and where the prophetic voice of the churches may be lifted in a call to common action.

The Ecumenical Centre central building will still be a focal point architecturally in the Green Village, but it will not be the lobby of passage between wings, nor house facilities for the surrounding buildings. The architectural assessment points the way to renovation of the Ecumenical Chapel and main hall, to the highest standards. The opportunity to redesign other areas will be welcomed, and is necessary to ensure our future in Geneva, with an affordable Ecumenical Centre, adapted to our needs. As examples, the roof skylights above the lobby could be improved; new purpose could be found for the many extensive areas now consigned for equipment and storage; and office and working areas could be extended, for many staff, in the gallery, former conference rooms and other areas.

With increased light and life in the building, and with discernment, we believe that the “central building” will reclaim its identity as the Ecumenical Centre, with sufficient working space for the staff of the WCC and sister organizations in one building; and that is now the direction which we wish to follow in the light of this technical assessment.

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



## **Ecumenical Institute Bossey: Honouring Tradition, Developing a Dynamic Future**

In recent years, the student population at the Ecumenical Institute Bossey has reflected more diversity, even as it collectively faces a world with unprecedented challenges.

In the recent past, Bossey students tended to come mainly from the global South, the 32 students who started the 2019-2020 academic year represented 19 countries: China, Cuba, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Madagascar, Nigeria, Romania, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, and the United States of America.

"At Bossey, it is often observed, the institute provides the academic content, but much of the core of students' formation comes from what happens outside the classroom, through their interaction in discussions, communal prayer each morning, and dining together.

The Ecumenical Institute draws graduate students and researchers from around the world for residential academic study, focusing on pressing issues in the ecumenical movement and the world through studies in ecumenical theology, missiology, social ethics, and ecumenical hermeneutics.

### **Cooperation fostered between mission agencies and the Ecumenical Institute Bossey**

Three mission agencies - Communauté d'Églises en Mission, United Evangelical Mission, and the Council for World Mission - have pledged to deepen their already strong ties with the Ecumenical Institute Bossey.

In addition to fostering contacts and regular exchange, they agreed upon organizing common summer schools and leadership trainings as well as promoting Bossey's academic programmes among member churches.

It is hoped that, through intense cooperation and the agencies' continual support, the Institute will be able to ensure and enhance students' missiological training even as it looks to further collaboration in the future.

### **New website launched for Bossey Hotel and Conference Centre**

A brand-new website now shows the breadth and quality of services offered at the WCC's Hotel and Conference Centre at the Château de Bossey.

Paired with a new visual expression for the Château, the website is accessible at [www.chateaubossey.ch](http://www.chateaubossey.ch), and showcases the variety of services at the hotel, which include accommodation, restaurant, banquets, seminars, and more.

The new website is one element in efforts improve Bossey's communication with potential guests and visitors.

The newly launched website comes not only with a new design but also a few technical perks, such as more well-integrated booking tools, intended to streamline the experience for those looking to make reservations at the Château.

Bossey has a long history of offering hospitality to guests from all walks of life, and the hotel and conference centre enable guests to experience the calm, the friendliness, and the authenticity of the château and its surroundings.

Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the scaling down of services in 2020.

### **Voices of students**

*“The main reason I want to study here is for the experience with other people, from other countries and other church traditions. For example, the Orthodox Church, I’m so fascinated to learn more about the Orthodox Church.”*

**—Simone de Giuseppe, from the Baptist Church in Italy**

*“In terms of the religious aspect, we are open because as you know, as Pentecostals, we believe in prayers. And of course, we know that the course at Bossey helps students overcome prejudices that they might have, you know, like, say, between Orthodox and Protestant and Catholic and Pentecostal or, if there is some hostility to ecumenism in your church.”*

**—Rev. Joshua Koroma, from the Kingdom Life Pentecostal Church in Sierra Leone**

*“In ecumenism, we are talking about church unity. I feel strongly about it as there can be conflict between churches. Much of the time, it is because of misunderstandings between each other. So, ecumenism is important for me so that we could bring one another together; so, we can talk to each other?”*

**—Jin Liu, from the China Council in Shanghai**

## Important Publications and Documents 2014-2021

The chief WCC publications, both books and journal issues—since the last assembly are listed here. Further information on books and on the WCC's three journals is available at <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications>

### 2014

- Christopher Dorn, ed., *Peace in Christian Thought and Life*
- *WCC Annual Review of 2013*, along with *Finance Report* and *Finance Report Activities Appendix*
- Jooseop Keum, ed., *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes, with a Practical Guide*
- John Calhoun and Ranjan Solomon, eds., *Palestinian Prisoners: A Question of Conscience*
- Wolfgang Huber, tr. Margaret Kohl, *This I Trust: Basic Words of Christian Belief*
- CCIA, *The Churches in International Affairs: Reports 2010-2013*
- CCIA, *The Churches in International Affairs: Reports 2007-2009*
- Tamara Grdzeldze, ed., *Sources of Authority: Volume 1: The Early Church*, Faith and Order Papers 217
- Tamara Grdzeldze, ed., *Sources of Authority, Volume 2: Contemporary Churches*, Faith and Order Papers 218
- Jessie Fubara-Manuel, *Giver of Life, Hear Our Cries!* Visions & Voices series
- Edward Dommen, *A Peacable Economy*, Visions & Voices series
- Clare Amos, *Peace-ing Together Jerusalem*, Visions & Voices series
- Meehyung Chung, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, Visions & Voices series
- Douglas Pratt, *Being Open, Being Faithful: The Journey of Interreligious Dialogue*
- Susan Kim and Maike Gorsboth, eds., *Ripples in the Water: Success Stories Striving for Water Justice*
- Erlinda N. Senturias and Theodore A. Gill, Jr., eds., *Encountering the God of Life: Report of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches*
- Mathews George Chunakara, ed., *Building Peace on Earth: Report of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation*
- Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *Ninth Report: 2007-2012*
- Konrad Raiser, tr. Stephen Brown, *Religion, Power, Politics*
- ***The Ecumenical Review***
  - March – All Things New: Faith, Formation and the Future
  - July – The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace
  - October – New Perspectives on *Diakonia*
  - December – Vatican II in Retrospect
- ***International Review of Mission***
  - April – Mission in the Busan Assembly
  - November – Evangelism as Discipleship
- ***Current Dialogue***
  - December – God and Allah

## 2015

- Michael Taylor, *Christ and Capital: A Family Debate*
- Keith Clements, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ecumenical Quest*
- Natalie Maxson, *Journey for Justice: The Story of Women in the WCC*
- Baldwin Sjollem, *Never Bow to Racism: A Personal Account of the Ecumenical Struggle*
- *WCC Annual Review of 2014*, along with *Finance Report* and *Finance Report Activities Appendix*
- Petra Bosse-Huber, Serge Fornerod, Thies Gundlach, and Gottfried Wilhelm Locher, eds., *Reformation: Legacy and Future*
- Rogate R. Mshana and Athena Peralta, eds., *Economy of Life: Linking Poverty, Wealth and Ecology*
- *The Other Is My Neighbour: Developing an Ecumenical Response to Migration*
- ***The Ecumenical Review***
  - March – Christianity in China
  - July – Economy of Life
  - October – A Dialogue on Believers' Baptism
  - December – Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Theology in Africa
- ***International Review of Mission***
  - April - Mission, Gender, and Power
  - November - *Evangelii Gaudium* and Ecumenism
- ***Current Dialogue***
  - December – Multiple Religious Belonging: Exploring Hybridity, Embracing Hospitality

## 2016

- Michael Kinnamon, ed., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*
- Grace Ji-Sun Kim, ed., *Making Peace with the Earth: Action and Advocacy for Climate Justice*
- Ezra Chitando and Nyambura Njoroge, ed., *Abundant Life: The Churches and Sexuality*, EHAIA series
- Peniel Jesudas Rufus Rajkumar and Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, ed., *Many yet One? Multiple Religious Belonging*
- Jesudas M. Athyal, ed., *A Light to the Nations: The Indian Presence in the Ecumenical Movement in the Twentieth Century*
- *WCC Annual Review of 2015*, along with *Finance Report* and *Finance Report Activities Appendix*
- Olav Fykse Tveit, *The Truth We Owe Each Other: Mutual Accountability in the Ecumenical Movement*
- Manoj Kurian, *Passion and Compassion: The Ecumenical Journey with HIV*
- Hans-Ruedi Weber, updated by Robert K. Welsh, *The Story of Bossey: A Laboratory for Ecumenical Life*
- Athena Peralta and Rogate R. Mshana, *The Greed Line: Tool for a Just Economy*
- Jürgen Moltmann, tr. Margaret Kohl, *The Living God and the Fullness of Life*
- WCC Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, *Who Do We Say That We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World*
- Gillian Paterson and Callie Long, eds., *Dignity, Freedom, and Grace: Christian Perspectives on HIV, AIDS, and Human Rights*

- ***The Ecumenical Review***
  - March – Roots of Religious Violence in the Middle East
  - November – Ecumenical Identity and Self-Understanding
  - December – Religion and Development
- ***International Review of Mission***
  - July - Evangelism in the City
  - November – Transforming Discipleship
- ***Current Dialogue***
  - December – Who Do We Say That We Are?

## 2017

- Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara, tr. Alan J. Amos, *Divine Hospitality: A Christian-Muslim Conversation*
- Gerrit Noort, Kyriaki Avtzi, and Stefan Paas, eds., *Sharing Good News: Handbook on Evangelism in Europe*
- *WCC Annual Review* of 2016, along with *Finance Report* and *Finance Report Activities Appendix*
- Semegnish Asfaw, ed., *I Belong: Biblical Reflections on Statelessness*
- Sarah Hinlicky Wilson and Aikaterini Pekridou, eds., *A Communion in Faith and Love: Elisabeth Bebr-Sigel's Ecclesiology*, Doxa & Praxis series
- Thomas F. Best, Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA, John Gibaut, Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Despina Prassas, eds., *Growth in Agreement IV: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 2004 – 2014*, Book 1, Faith and Order Papers 219
- Thomas F. Best, Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA, John Gibaut, Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Despina Prassas, eds., *Growth in Agreement IV: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 2004 – 2014*, Book 2, Faith and Order Papers 219
- Edited by Gerrit Noort, Kyriaki Avtzi and Stefan Paas, eds., *Sharing Good News: Handbook on Evangelism in Europe*
- Athena Peralta, ed., *Food and Finance: Toward Life-Enhancing Agriculture*, online only
- Andrew Donaldson, ed., *Hosanna! Ecumenical Songs for Justice and Peace*
- Semegnish Asfaw, *The Invisible among Us*, Visions and Voices series
- ***The Ecumenical Review***
  - March – Ecumenical Recognition, Ecumenical Utopia
  - July – Reformation
  - October – Praying for Rain: African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change
  - December – Ecumenical Theology in Asia
- ***International Review of Mission***
  - June – Missional Formation
  - December – Transforming Mission: Perspectives from Africa
- ***Current Dialogue***
  - December – Religion and Violence

## 2018

- *Arusha publishing*: A major focus of the books portion of WCC Publications in early 2018 was preparation and printing of materials for the March 2018 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania. Ten publications in several languages were produced,

including programme and resource books, handbooks, and spirituality resources for the meeting of more than 1000 people.

- Lesmore Gibson Ezekiel and Jooseop Keum, eds., *From Achimote to Arusha: An Ecumenical Journey of Mission in Africa*, co-published with All African Conference of Churches.
- *WCC Annual Review of 2017*, along with *Finance Report* and *Finance Report Activities Appendix*
- *Faith and Order Papers Digital Edition*: Digital edition of 340 publications available at Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition>
- 70th anniversary materials: Booklets and worship materials for central committee, 70th anniversary, and the papal visit.
- *Translating the Word, Transforming the World*. A textbook anthology of key ecumenical and missiological documents for the 2018 GETI meeting in Arusha.
- Carlos A. Sintado and Manuel Quintero Pérez, tr. Tony Coates, *Emilio Castro: A Legacy of Passionate Ecumenism*
- Konrad Raiser, tr. and ed. Stephen G. Brown, *The Challenge of Transformation: An Ecumenical Journey*
- Donald W. Norwood, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: Introducing the World Council of Churches*
- Susan Durber and Fernando Enns, *Walking Together: Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*
- J. Michael West and Gunnar Mägi, eds., *Your Word Is Truth: The Bible in Ten Christian Traditions*, a joint United Bible Societies/WCC publication
- PJP publications: Latin America and the Caribbean (print version in Spanish and Portuguese) and Canada (online, hosted by Kairos Canada).
- ***The Ecumenical Review***
  - March – Walking Together, Serving Justice and Peace
  - July – “Behold I Make All Things New”: 1968 and the Churches
  - October – The World Council of Churches at 70
  - December – Theology of the *Oikos*
- ***International Review of Mission***
  - June – Pentecostal Mission Theology
  - December – Mission Quo Vadis
- ***Current Dialogue***
  - December – Miscellaneous articles

## 2019

- WCC Faith & Order, *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, Faith and Order Papers 224
- WCC Faith & Order, *Two Messages: United and Uniting Churches*, Faith and Order Papers 225
- WCC Faith & Order, *They Showed Us Unusual Kindness: Resources for the 2020 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, Faith and Order Papers 226
- *WCC Annual Review of 2018*, along with *Finance Report* and *Finance Report Activities Appendix*
- Risto Jukko and Jooseop Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit: Report of the WCC World Conference on Mission and Evangelism*

- Risto Jukko et al., eds., *Called to Transforming Discipleship: Devotions from the WCC World Conference on Mission and Evangelism*
- *Complete Digital Edition of the Arusha Report* (online only)
- Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and WCC, *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World: A Christian Perspective*
- EHAIA training manuals (6 books, various languages):
  - *Féminités et Masculinités: Guide sur perceptions, significations et repercussions en milieu Congolais RDC à l'ère du VIH et SIDA*
  - *Positive Masculinities and Femininities: Handbook for Adolescents and Young People in Faith Communities in Nigeria*
  - La «guérison par la foi seule» face à l'infection au VIH: *Manuel à l'usage des responsables religieux*
  - *Treatment Adherence and Faith Healing in the Context of HIV and AIDS in Africa: Training Manual for Religious Leaders*
  - *Uzingatiaji Wa Matibabu Na Uponyaji Wa Kiimani Katika Mukstadha*
  - *Wa Vvu Na Ukimwi Barani Afrika* (Kiswahili)
  - *Gukir' Agakoko Gatera Sida Mu Kwizera Gusa: Integanya Nyigisho Z'abayobozi B'amatorero N'amadini, Igitabo Cyagenewe Abayobozi B'amatorero N'amadin*(Kinyarwanda)
- Amélé Ekué et al., eds., *For Those Who Wish to Hear: Emerging Theologians on Mission and Evangelism*
- Jürgen Moltmann, tr. Margaret Kohl and Brian McNeil, *Hope in These Troubled Times* (December launch)
- Fulata Lusungu Moyo, *Healing Together: A Facilitator's Resource for Ecumenical Faith and Community-Based Counseling*
- ***The Ecumenical Review***
  - January/April – Freedom, Love, Justice
  - July – Ecumenical Dialogue Today and Tomorrow
  - October – Pan-African Women of Faith and a Vision of Inclusive Global Theological Education
- ***International Review of Mission***
  - June – Mission and People with Disabilities
  - November – Emerging Missional Movements
- ***Current Dialogue***
  - December - In Honesty and in Hope: Rethinking Interreligious Engagement for Our Times

## 2020

- Mwai Makoka, *Health-Promoting Churches: Reflections on Health and Healing for Churches on Commemorative World Health Days.*
- Frederique Seidel with Virág Kinga Mezei. *Climate Justice with and for Children and Youth in Churches: Get Informed, Get Inspired, Take Action.*
- *Healing the World: Eight Bible Studies for the Pandemic Era.*
- *WCC Annual Review of 2019*, along with *Finance Report* and *Finance Report Activities Appendix*
- *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action During COVID-19 and Beyond.* World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (in 9 languages.)

- Anne Casparsson et al., eds., *The Light of Peace. Churches in Solidarity with the Korean Peninsula*.
- Frederique Seidel and Emmanuel de Martel. *Cooler Earth - Higher Benefits: Actions by those who care about children, climate and finance*.
- Kenneth R. Ross. *Mission Rediscovered: Transforming Disciples. A Commentary on the Arusha Call to Discipleship*.
- *Pilgrim Prayer: The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle*.
- ***The Ecumenical Review***
  - January – Global Manifestations of Racism Today
  - April – The Spirit of Truth in a Digital Age
  - July – The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church
  - December – Christ’s Love in the Midst of Pandemic
- ***International Review of Mission***
  - June – Mission Miscellany
  - November – Christ’s Love as Reconciling Love
- ***Current Dialogue***
  - December - Rooted in Experience: Understanding Christ and Christ’s Love Interreligiously.

## 2021

- Myriam Wijlens and Vladimir Shmaliy, eds., *Churches and Moral Discernment: Volume 1: Learning from Traditions*. Faith and Order Paper 228.
- Myriam Wijlens, Vladimir Shmaliy, and Simone Sinn, eds., *Churches and Moral Discernment: Volume 2: Learning from History*. Faith and Order Paper 229
- *Love and Witness: Proclaiming the Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ in a Religiously Plural World*. Faith and Order Paper 230.
- *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and within Creation*. Faith and Order Paper 226.
- Ellen Wondra, Stephanie Dietrich, and Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, eds., *Churches Respond To The Church: Towards A Common Vision, Volume I*. Faith and Order Paper 231.
- Ellen Wondra, Stephanie Dietrich, and Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, eds., *Churches Respond To the Church: Towards a Common Vision, Volume II*. Faith and Order Paper 232.
- Marianne Ejdersten et al., eds., *Voices of Lament, Hope, and Courage: A Week of Prayer in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. (In 4 languages)
- *WCC Annual Review of 2020*, along with *Finance Report* and *Finance Report Activities Appendix*
- Mwai Makoka, ed., *Health-Promoting Churches Volume II: A Handbook to Accompany Churches in Establishing and Running Sustainable Health Promotion Ministries*.
- *Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity: An introduction to the theme of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Karlsruhe 2022* (in 4 languages)
- *Parce Que Dieu M'aime-Affirmer Ma Valeur En Christ: Un programme d'éducation chrétienne contra la violence basée sur le genre*.
- Myriam Wijlens, Vladimir Shmaliy, and Simone Sinn, eds., *Churches and Moral Discernment Volume 3: Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia*.



- Ellen Wondra, Stephanie Dietrich, and Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, eds., *What Are the Churches Saying About the Church? Key Findings and Proposals from the Responses to The Church: Towards a Common Vision Faith and Order Paper No. 236*
- Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, ed., *Faith(s) Seeking Justice: Liberation and the Rethinking of Interreligious Dialogue.*
- Churches' Commitments to Children. *Cooler Earth – Increased Benefits: Actions by Those who Care about Children, Climate and Finance (Second Edition)*
- *Ecumenical International Youth Day Event Toolkit 2021: Young People and Climate Change.*
- *Walk the Talk: A Toolkit to Accompany the "Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice."*
- Petter Jakobsson, Risto Jukko, and Olle Kristenson, eds., *Sharing and Learning: Bible, Mission, and Receptive Ecumenism.*
- *Thursdays in Black Bible Studies Series 1: Listening, Learning and Responding to the Word of God.*
- Risto Jukko, ed., *Call to Discipleship: Mission in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*
- New International Financial and Economic Architecture initiative (NIFEA). *ZacTax Toolkit.*
- Jennifer Philpot-Nissen, *Killer Robots: A Campaign Guide for Churches.*
- Isabel Apawo Phiri, Collins Shava, eds., *The Africa We Pray For on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: PJP Series Vol 1.*
- Joy Eva Bohol, Benjamin Simon, eds., *Let the Waves Roar: Perspectives of Young Prophetic Voices in the Ecumenical Movement.*
- Louk A. Andrianos, Tom Sverre Tomren, eds., *Contemporary Ecotheology, Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship in World Religions: Ecothee Volume 6 - Orthodox Academy of Crete.* Published by Embla Akademis
- ***The Ecumenical Review***
  - January - Theological Exchanges: The Ecumenical Reception of Orthodoxy
  - April- Recalling the Past, Looking to the Future
  - July - Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity
  - October - Reflections on the *Oikoumene*
- ***International Review of Mission***
  - May – Reconciliation as a Missional Task
  - November – Mission in Unity
- ***Current Dialogue***
  - December – Fifty Years of Dialogue: Embracing the Past, Envisioning the Future