

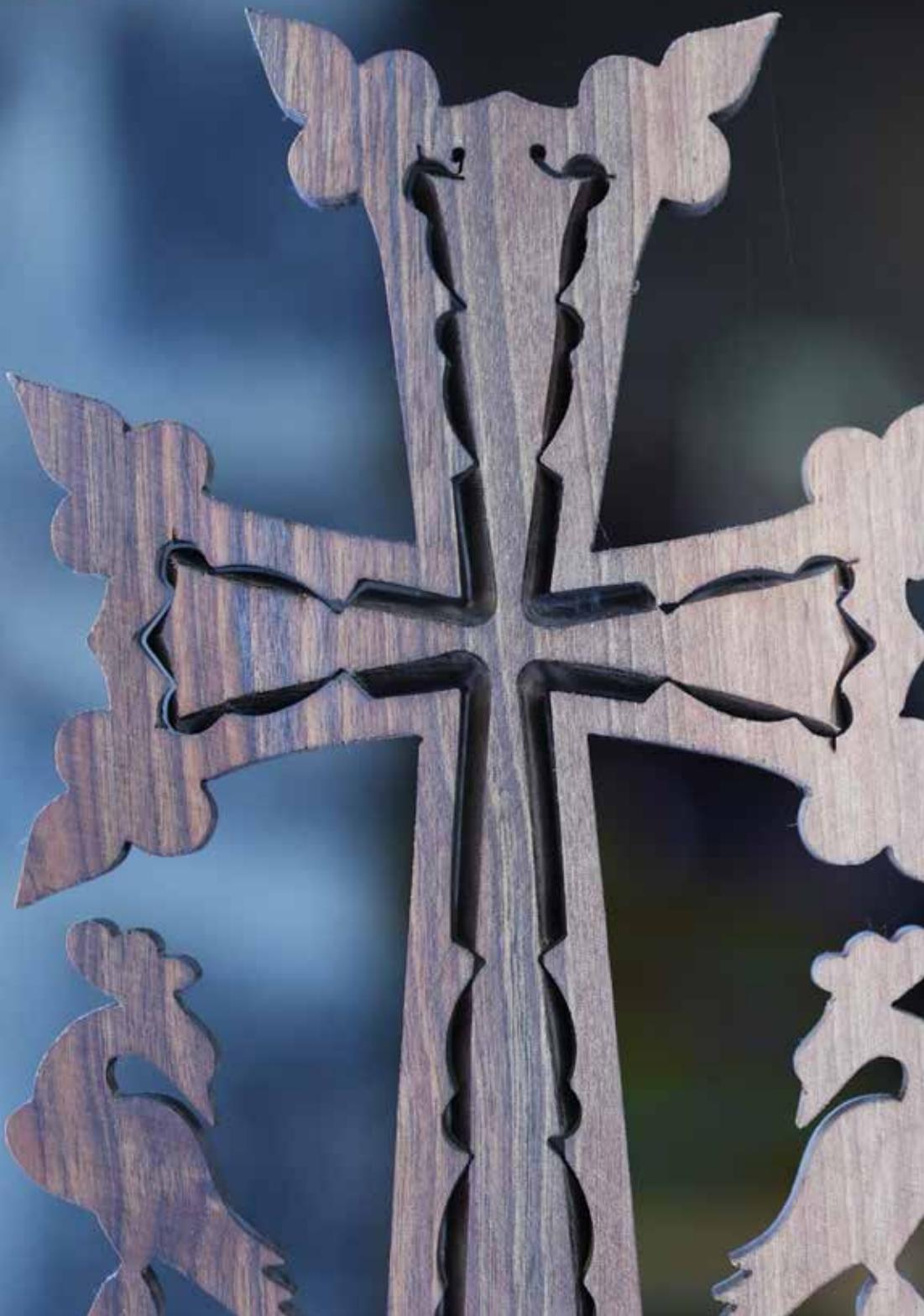


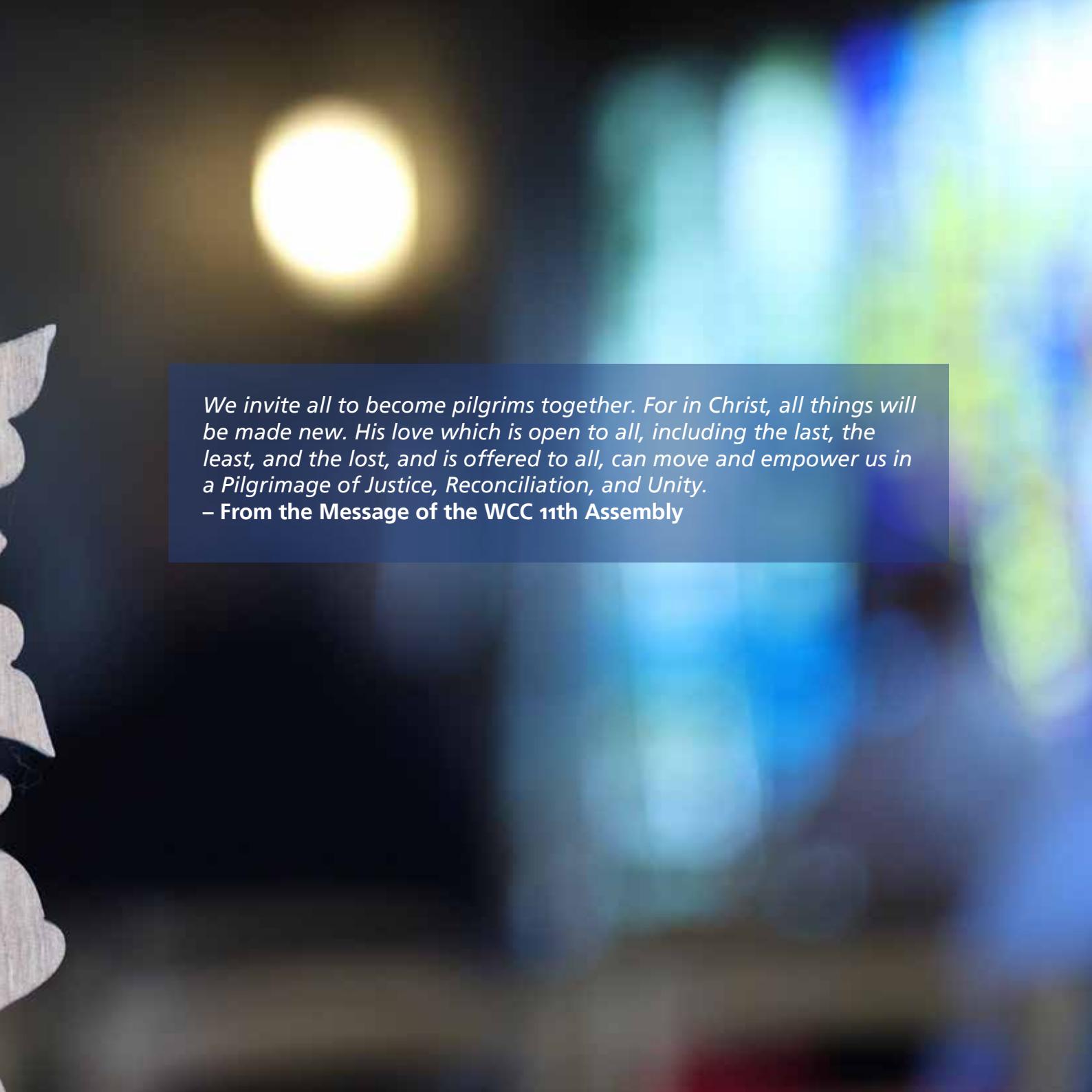
World Council  
of Churches



ANNUAL REVIEW 2023

# For Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity





*We invite all to become pilgrims together. For in Christ, all things will be made new. His love which is open to all, including the last, the least, and the lost, and is offered to all, can move and empower us in a Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity.*

**– From the Message of the WCC 11th Assembly**

The World Council of Churches is a global fellowship of churches which confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, according to the scriptures. The fellowship seeks to fulfil a common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We are a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ. We seek to advance towards this unity, as Jesus prayed for his followers "so that the world may believe" (John 17:21).

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement toward Christian unity.

The WCC comprises churches, denominations, and church fellowships in more than 120 countries and territories, representing over 580 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed churches, as well as many united and independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American, today most member churches are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Pacific. There are now 352 member churches.

For its member churches, the WCC is a unique space: one in which they can reflect, speak, act, worship, and work together, challenge and support each other, share and debate with each other.

As members of this fellowship, WCC member churches:

- are called to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship;
- promote their common witness in work for mission and evangelism;
- engage in Christian service by serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation;
- foster renewal in unity, worship, mission, and service.

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PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

As we look back over 2023, I wish to celebrate the steps we took toward a world that is more just, reconciled, and unified—but also to reflect on the grave challenges still facing us and, most of all, why hope is always warranted.

The journey of the WCC in 2023 involved many international visits that built bridges, fostered dialogue and created safe spaces in which we can disagree with love, friendship, and civility and keep unity still intact.

This 2023 Annual Review reminds us of the importance of striving to strengthen the fellowship in both creative and traditional ways. As we look over key events—among them the WCC’s own 75th anniversary—we offer, for the first time, a special visual section that commemorates the WCC’s 75 years as well as an unprecedented number of exhibitions and commemorations that graced the Ecumenical Centre during 2023.

The year 2023 was one of new beginnings: the WCC central committee met in person for the first time since the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in September 2022, the WCC commissions newly convened, and we began implementing the WCC Strategic Plan for 2023–2030 in earnest.

I think back on how the WCC was founded after the Second World War when many people had lost hope and certainly had lost loved ones. The world today seems to be at a crossroads of crises. I believe this Annual Review shows some—though certainly not all—of the ways in which the WCC has displayed initiative and innovation for the betterment of humanity. Amidst the numerous conflicts, sufferings, wars, violence, and climate challenges we face in the world today, the WCC has worked and sustained the call for justice, peace, reconciliation, and unity.

In 2023, we successfully raised the profile of the WCC. We shared our values of human dignity, social justice, and inclusion—the values of the Pilgrimages of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity—hallmarks of the reign of God and of Christian faith.

May the WCC continue to serve as an instrument of transformation that upholds the prospects of life and hope for all humanity and creation!

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



# Pilgrims on the way

The year 2023 was one of new leadership for the WCC: a new general secretary was installed and new staff leadership was appointed. Two-thirds of the WCC Staff Leadership Group were new to their positions in 2023. The governing bodies of the executive and central committees met for the first time in their new configuration after being elected at the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022.

As the WCC celebrated the installation of Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay as the ninth WCC general secretary, ecumenical leaders, colleagues, friends, and family gathered in person and online for a special ceremony in the chapel of the Ecumenical Centre in February 2023.

Pillay, previously dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria, is from South Africa and ordained by the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa.

Amid prayers, singing, and a sermon by Pillay, the celebration also included special greetings from churches and partners.

In his message, entitled “Church at the Crossroads,” Pillay reflected that the purpose of the church is to

proclaim the saving love and grace of Christ to the world. “It does this as it goes out into the world to preach, teach, baptize, and disciple believers,” he said. “The church ought to live to fulfil the purpose of God.”

Pillay made his first report to the WCC central committee in June 2023, reflecting on the WCC 11th Assembly theme, providing insight into the WCC Strategic Plan 2023-2030, sharing information about programmatic work, and offering a vision for the future.

“The 11th WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, was indeed a spectacular and memorable celebration,” he said. “It was so fantastic to see over 4,000 people come together to pray, share the joy of fellowship, work, and deliberate together on various matters.”

At the same June central committee meeting, committee moderator Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm said that the world was experiencing a crisis of values, a spiritual crisis, and a crisis of the political will to do what is right and just.

Bedford-Strohm implored the WCC to serve this world through its Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

Unity, adding, “The Word Council of Churches is more important than ever to proclaim healing to a broken world and act upon it.”

Receiving the Assembly Youth Statement, the central committee affirmed the establishment of youth advisors for the central committee and their presence as a way to address the inadequate number of young people elected at the WCC’s 11th Assembly. The central committee recommended that “this category not be a recurring solution.” It proposed that “a strategy be developed starting now to ensure that youth will be represented at the next assemblies at 25 percent.” Four stewards

serving during the meeting made for a memorable mentorship experience for the next generation.

The central committee approved the WCC’s Strategic Plan 2023-2030, taking into account the interrelation of programmes, and determined that the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity will serve as a programmatic umbrella.

Turning priorities into actions in all programmatic areas and further strengthening the WCC’s influence on world affairs in a spirit of pilgrimage, reconciliation, and unity, were key objectives.



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

The Strategic Plan 2023-2030 will guide the work of the council until the next assembly.

Bedford-Strohm noted: “In a difficult time for a wounded world, this WCC governing body has a great responsibility to develop strategies for the future which can help the world heal. We are confident that Christ’s love will help the world move to justice, reconciliation, and unity.”

“Some member churches have adopted this approach already; others are just beginning to receive this idea of a spiritual journey which can be taken together,” acknowledged the central committee.

The governing body also discussed the common understanding of unity, in which it became clear that the focus for the WCC is on the unity of the church as a sign of God’s reconciling of all humankind and all creation. “Yet, different ideas were exchanged, when to invite people of other faiths to become part of the companionship, especially in multi-religious contexts,” reads the report. “The common understanding of ecumenical *diakonia* provides more coherence to the programmatic work.”



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC



PHOTO: AREGBE SEGUN ABRAHAM/WCC

### **WCC executive committee joyously welcomed in Nigeria**

The WCC executive committee met in November 2023 in Nigeria, hosted by member churches and joyously welcomed by local communities.

The executive committee approved plans and a budget for 2024, and further developed the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity. The WCC governing body also monitored 2023 and the implementation of WCC strategies. In addition to releasing four public statements, they also discussed the Green Village development project as well as ways to accompany member churches.

The meeting closed with a prayer at the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

## Voices from central committee leadership

Heard during a press conference in Nigeria during the WCC executive committee meeting held in Abuja from 8 to 14 November 2023...



*"We have been impressed by the religious vibrancy of this country, not only by the beauty of the countryside, by the beauty of the people, but by the strong religious basis of Nigeria. I want to assure you of our prayers."*

—Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, moderator, highlighting an executive committee statement on Nigeria and its regional context



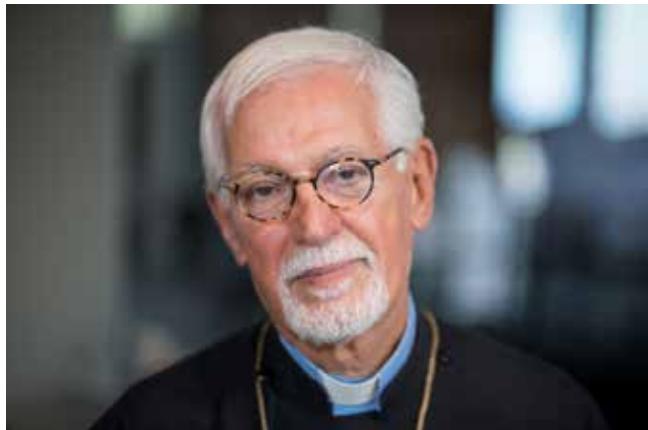
*"The WCC is interested and is concerned about all justice issues, and climate justice is one of those issues. We are calling for greater attention to renewable energy, that we will now find alternative ways for sourcing and finding energy for our populations, that we will give great attention to global warming. It is important that, as we call for more renewable energy, that we are also calling for greater climate financing."*

— Rev. Merlyn Hyde Riley, vice-moderator, speaking of the WCC executive committee's statement on the United Nations COP28

PHOTOS: ALBIN HILLER / WCC

The press conference was offered as a panel discussion, followed by a question-and-answer session. In introducing the panel, His Holiness Rev. Dr Rufus Okikiola Ositelu, Church of the Lord (Prayer Fellowship) Worldwide, who serves as the

WCC president from Africa, gave a heartfelt message of gratitude to the WCC member churches and communities in Nigeria. “For this, we say thank you, and God bless you all,” he said.



*“Why the World Council of Churches? Because the World Council of Churches is an important organization in the world that tries to find a solution for those people who are suffering. We thank God for this organization, and we thank the leadership of the World Council of Churches for following, and continuing to follow, what is happening in Nagorno-Karabakh.”*

—H.E. Archbishop Dr Vicken Aykazian, vice-moderator, expressing deep appreciation for the WCC’s statement on the need for international response to the needs of Nagorno-Karabakh refugees



*“We work on a very broad scale of interreligious cooperation and collaboration in the field of peace efforts. Since the attack of Hamas on Israel on 7 October, there has been continued retaliation by Israel, and so the situation in Gaza is really, really bad. We have called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Our view as the WCC is that violence and wars do not contribute to peaceful negotiations.”*

—Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, WCC general secretary, speaking about the executive committee’s statement on Palestine and Israel

PHOTOS: ALBIN HILLER/WCC



## Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, jointly published by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC since 1968, is traditionally celebrated in the Northern Hemisphere from 18-25 January. In the southern hemisphere, where January is a vacation time, churches often find other days to celebrate it, for example, around Pentecost, which is also a symbolic date for unity. Millions of people unite to observe the special week.

“Do good; seek justice” (Isaiah 1:17) was the theme for 2023’s observance. From 18 to 25 January, churches

drew together across the globe to reflect on how learning to do right requires engaging in self-reflection.

Christians from Minnesota developed the resources with input from an international group representing the Roman Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission. The resources included an ecumenical opening prayer service, biblical reflections, prayers for eight days, and other elements of worship.



PHOTO: AREGBE SEGUN/ABRAHAM/WCC

# Fellowship. Solidarity. Community.

## WCC celebrates 75 years

### Dance, song, vivid memories

Founded in Amsterdam in 1948, the WCC marked its 75th anniversary as a joyous and reflective celebration in the Ecumenical Centre in June 2023. Ecumenical figures—young and old—reminisced about memorable occasions, highlighting their memories with singing and happiness and ruminating on their work. The celebration included not only celebrating the past, but also dreaming about the future.

Participants arrived to live music at the ceremony in the Visser 't Hooft Hall, named for the first general secretary of the WCC. They received two gifts—the report of the WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, 2022, which reflects on many facets of its ecumenical work, and *Your Word Is Truth*, volume 2, a co-publication with the United Bible Society. The anniversary was also marked by an issue of *The Ecumenical Review*, titled “A Living Fellowship of Churches.”

Participants joined in dancing in the hall, singing, “We are marching in the light of God.”

Central committee moderator Bishop Dr Heinrich

Bedford-Strohm thanked God “for the outbreak of joy. Let us experience this spirit when we go home.” The participants sang Happy Birthday to the WCC with loud cheers.

An ecumenical celebration was also held at Saint Pierre Cathedral in Geneva during the June central committee meeting, recalling the founding of the WCC three years after the end of the Second World War.

### WCC retirees joyfully gather

Forty retired WCC staff gathered at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in August 2023 to celebrate the WCC’s 75th anniversary.

Noted ecumenical theologian Hubert van Beek worked at the WCC from 1992 to 2004 in the then newly founded office of Church and Ecumenical Relations. “I had several responsibilities, and one was to continue developing relationships with non-member churches, particularly with the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches,” he said. His work proved instrumental in founding the Global Christian Forum.



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC





PHOTO: GLORIA KOYMANS/WCC



PHOTO: IVARS KUPCIS/WCC



PHOTO: IVARS KUPCIS/WCC



PHOTO: IVARS KUPCIS/WCC

wards rape a world and violence  
Dignity  
DOES ME INVITE  
SAFETY  
FOR  
JUSTICE

## Spiritual and visual artists shine in 2023

A walk through Bethlehem. A talk with the birds. A glimpse of working the fields. A dialogue with those affected by gender-based violence. The year 2023 brought an artistic wave of inspiration to the Ecumenical Centre and beyond.

### "Bethlehem Reborn"

The exhibition "Bethlehem Reborn—Palestine—The Wonders of the Nativity" opened in September 2023. The mosaics, columns, and crafted woods reminded those in Geneva and beyond of the birth of Jesus and the new life and new hope it inspires, even as the world struggles with many challenges.

### "Every Picture Tells A Story"

A photo exhibition by Most Rev. Dr Martin Modéus, archbishop of the Church of Sweden and primate of Uppsala, opened in November 2023 in the Ecumenical Centre.

A blend of photography and reflection, the exhibition comprised 14 framed still images and invited viewers into a dialogue between image and observer. The photographs, accompanied by short captions—often with a humorous or unexpected twist—were designed to inspire reflection and conversation.

### "Land, Life, Seeds, and Love"

The WCC hosted the exhibition "Guardians of Land, Life, Seeds, and Love," which celebrated the strength, resilience, and contributions of the Rural Women's Assembly.

### "Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance"

Carrying women's stories of survivors and hope, the "Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance" flowed with 181 blocks, each telling its own story, and drew attention from global visitors throughout 2023.

# **Witnessing. Transforming. Discipling.**

## **Thursdays in Black steps up, steps out**

### **WCC leaders step up as ambassadors**

By becoming Thursdays in Black ambassadors, WCC leaders joined 31 other such ambassadors to advocate for a world without rape and violence—part of the global campaign that calls on people to wear black on Thursdays as a sign of their commitment to this goal.

WCC general secretary, Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, explained why he became an ambassador. “Sexual abuse and violence based on a person’s gender or vulnerability should have no place on our streets, in our homes, schools, workplaces, and worship communities,” Pillay said. “From growing up in South Africa to now serving as the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, I have seen the personal tragedies and the community and societal impact of sexual and gender-based violence.”

Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, moderator of the WCC central committee, described the Thursdays in Black campaign as “a witness to Jesus Christ.”

The issue can hardly be overestimated, he urged. “Sexual violence against women and children is such a burning

issue, especially for the churches,” he said. “It is a topic still swept under the rug in societies and, sometimes, especially in churches. What should not be, cannot be.”

Rev. Merlyn Hyde Riley, general secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union and vice-moderator of the WCC central committee, commented that she became an ambassador to stop gender-based violence from denying human dignity. “I’m really proud to be an ambassador in the fight against gender-based violence,” she said. “I find gender-based violence to be extremely concerning because it is so pervasive and so destructive.”

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, also a vice-moderator of the WCC central committee, said he became a Thursdays in Black ambassador to “stand with those who are survivors of gender-based violence, those who have lost loved ones to gender-based violence, and those who strive for a world where all are free from terror and domination.”

He added: “Reaching a world free from rape and violence is not impossible in today’s world, but is imminently possible if we all take the small steps in every way we can, steps in all communities, for all people.”



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

## New book brings to life deeply personal artistry of “Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance”

A new book, *Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance—sharing the stories*, has brought to life in its pages the waterfall tapestry that captured global attention during the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe.

With depictions of panels, stories from creators, and quotes from those sharing personal pain and hope to overcome sexual and gender-based violence, the book's textured cover and translucent pages offer a sense of fragility woven together with resilience.

## Now...a Youth Edition

The Thursdays in Black campaign now has a Youth Edition, developed by young people who began building a network in support of a world free from rape and violence.

The unique initiative—and a video inspiring even more young people to get on board—was created at the conclusion of a workshop organized by the World Council of Churches and the World Association for Christian Communication in December 2023 to address online gender-based violence.

# A living laboratory - The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey

## So many countries, so many churches—and so much joy

At the Bossey graduation ceremony in January 2023, 27 students received certificates after they completed their studies in ecumenism, which prepared them to become vision-bearers and ambassadors of the ecumenical movement.

“In the microcosm of Bossey, you have learned how to live together in the world at large,” said WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, addressing students of different Christian traditions from 25 churches and 19 countries.

At a June 2023 graduation ceremony for seven master’s students from Cameroon, Kenya, India, Myanmar, Romania, and Trinidad and Tobago, there were prayers, smiles, and tears as one woman and six men spoke at a moving service on a day radiant with sunshine, joy, and celebration.

The student from Trinidad and Tobago recounted that gratitude is one of the special graces as he gave thanks for the course, and his fellow graduating students echoed his sentiments, also thanking local congregations for drawing them in.

“I will light a candle in memory of this fact that the master’s class were all in one place called Heaven,” said Stefan Wilson from the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago. “It was heaven—heaven when I forgot my clothes in the washing machine and was reminded. Heaven, when I was late to class one day, someone knocked on my door.”



PHOTO: GLORIA KOYMANS/WCC



PHOTO: GLORIA KOYMANS/WCC



PHOTO: IVARS KUPCIS/WCC



PHOTO: IVARS KUPCIS/WCC



PHOTO: IVARS KUPCIS/WCC



PHOTO: GLORIA KOYMANS/WCC



PHOTO: GLORIA KOYMANS/WCC



PHOTO: RHODA MPHANDE/WCC

## Bossey traditions evolve and thrive

### VISIT TO ROME

Students embarked on their annual study visit to Rome during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 2023. It was a full programme that included lectures, tours of the Vatican, and opportunities to interact with leaders from the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, other dicasteries and educational institutions in Rome. The highlight of the visit is the audience with the Pope at which students are especially recognized.

### BOSSEY ONLINE COURSE: "TOGETHER TOWARDS UNITY: BEING CHURCH IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD"

From 20 March to 11 June 2023, an international cohort of 16 students explored the biblical, theological, ethical, societal, interreligious, and missiological dimensions of ecumenism. A number of them are already serving their churches in ecumenical spheres. The online course is built on Bossey's long-established Ecumenical Studies courses to address the current changing landscape of ecumenism through a new medium.

### FORMATION EN THÉOLOGIE INTERCULTURELLE COURSE: "THIS DIFFERENCE THAT MAKES US VERY RICH"

Bossey students enrolled in a Formation en Théologie Interculturelle course of eight weekends that ended in May 2023. The 14 students, all from French-speaking parts of Europe, reflected on the rewards of their studies.

Patricia Fatima Santos, from Église évangélique Pentecôtiste Sion, said she chose the course because the theme was very interesting to her. “We all come from different church denominations, diverse cultures, and different countries,” she said. “Here, we can listen and learn from one another—and it is this difference that makes us very rich.”



PHOTO: RHODA MPHANDE/WCC



PHOTO: RHODA MPHANDE/WCC

## BOSSEY STUDENTS ENHANCE ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS IN SUMMER COURSE

Eleven students from eight different countries improved their English-speaking skills through an intensive summer course at the Ecumenical Institute in preparation for the Complementary Certificate in Ecumenical Studies, Master of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies, or a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies during the 2023-2024 academic year.

## INTERRELIGIOUS SUMMER COURSE

The interreligious summer course, “Health and Wholeness of Life in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” ran for six weeks, including three weeks of distance learning followed by a residential phase. The residential period included lectures, workshops, and study visits to places of interreligious interest. Seven students from six countries and all three religions studied together and graduated in August.

## A NEW ACADEMIC YEAR BEGAN

As their new academic year began in September 2023, Bossey students were reminded to share, engage, learn, teach, strategize, and expand their horizons.

Bossey students and faculty gathered for an opening prayer service in the Bossey chapel with 31 students from around the world as they embarked on an intense period of ecumenical community building, academic learning, and discovering profound connectivity between them.

## DIES ACADEMICUS

In October 2023, Dies Academicus brought hope with deep discourse under the theme “Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity.”



PHOTO: PAUL JEFFREY/WCC

## Care for creation

### WCC amplifies goal “to advance ecological justice and peace on the common Earth”

As Pope Francis presented a message in preparation for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on 1 September, WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay offered reflections that amplified the message and centred around the theme “Let Justice and Peace Flow.”

The Season of Creation, which runs from 1 September to 4 October, is marked by the Eastern and Western traditions of Christianity to foster a shared commitment to the stewardship of our common home.

The “Season for Creation is an ecumenical movement, started from the recommendation of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu in 2007 and then adopted the following year by the WCC central committee,” explained Pillay, describing the WCC’s role. “We are living at a time of climate crisis and biodiversity extinction, which threaten the existential life of the whole creation.”

### Churches march in New York City to declare no faith in fossil fuels

WCC representatives joined tens of thousands of demonstrators in September 2023 in New York City for the “March to End Fossil Fuels.” The march took place just before the United Nations General Assembly, where world leaders gathered for crucial climate discussions.

An interfaith invocation in conjunction with the march brought together people from various religious backgrounds. Frances Namoumou, from the Pacific Conference of Churches, delivered a Christian prayer focusing on water as a life-sustaining resource, emphasizing the need to safeguard it from exploitation and extraction.

## What will it take to re-green our earth?

A daylong seminar, “Caring for the Earth, Transforming Lives: Linking Faith and Natural Regeneration” in May 2023 convened in-person and online to harvest ideas on re-greening our planet.

Held at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, the meeting was co-organised by the World Council of Churches, Right Livelihood, Global EverGreening Alliance, Earth Trusteeship Working Group, Health of Mother Earth Foundation, World Vision International, and OikoDiplomatique.

Among the speakers was Australian agronomist Tony Rinaudo, who received the 2018 Right Livelihood Award for developing a technique that helps regrow trees in places where forests had been chopped down.

Rinaudo emphasized the need to listen to “the people closest to the land and those most in tune with climate change”—the very people whose growing seasons have changed and been subject to increasingly extreme weather events.



PHOTO: SIMON CHAMBERS/ACT

## COP28: A recap

### CAN WE PHASE OUT FOSSIL FUEL?

In a message after COP28, the WCC stated, “We must step up our ambition for phasing out fossil fuel.”

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay reflected on the disappointments, successes, and future agenda related to climate justice.

At COP28 a CEO of a large oil corporation took over the presidency of the climate talks for the first time—and this set the stage for lowering some expectations. There were also a record number of representatives from the fossil fuel industry in attendance—four times higher than the previous COP.

“However, to everyone’s surprise, the very first day of COP28 delivered a massive win by securing a Loss and Damage Fund, despite not enough commitments and pledges by the governments so far,” said Pillay.

At the heart of the COP28 negotiations was the culmination of the first-ever “global stocktake” under the Paris Agreement of 2015, focusing in particular on fossil fuels.

COP28 had to extend by an additional 23 hours to reach a consensus on this issue and included in its call a goal for “transitioning away from fossil fuel by 2050 and to accelerate action in this critical decade.”

After nearly 30 years of existence, this is the first time a COP decision has explicitly named fossil fuels.

### INDIGENOUS YOUTH ADVOCATE PAVES THE WAY

Julia Rensberg, a passionate advocate for youth and Indigenous Sami communities from the Church of Sweden, took centre stage at the Faith Pavilion’s side event at COP28 on “Interfaith Youth Dialogue on Climate Justice, Promoting Resilience and Hope.”

Drawing from real-life experiences and case studies, a panel of speakers showcased the impact of their on-the-ground efforts and support of the most vulnerable populations.

The discussion connected the challenges that communities face with lessons learned, transforming them into opportunities for creating innovative solutions to address climate impacts and foster sustainable societies.

Rensberg delivered a powerful message: “Adaptation to the climate crisis is a luxury. People living on the margins cannot afford it, as the consequences of the climate crisis are already a harsh reality. Recognizing that life depends on the earth’s health is not just a holistic view but a solution.”



PHOTO: SIMON CHAMBERS/ACT

### AT A COP28 SIDE EVENT, 12-YEAR-OLD FAITH SEBWA URGED THAT CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES BE INCLUDED IN CLIMATE DISCUSSIONS

In December 2023, during a COP28 side event titled “Faith Communities and Resilient Frontliners Responding to the Nexus of Food-Water-Climate Change,” in which the WCC participated, 12-year-old Faith Sebwa had a clear message to the world.

Sebwa, who has a hearing disability, spoke through a sign language interpreter. “Our ideas, our voices are very important, so please consult us when making these changes,” she said. “Children with disabilities must be included in the discussions about climate change.”



PHOTO: WCC

### WCC Eco School

The 2023 WCC Eco School released a declaration calling for climate justice and a transition to green energy, among other actions. Young adults from nine countries across Europe and North America gathered for the Eco School at the Conference and Research Centre of the Orthodox Academy of Crete in Kolympari, Crete, Greece, in November, where they discussed the challenges on the road to water justice, food justice, and climate justice.

The 5th WCC Eco School since 2015 was organized by the WCC Ecumenical Water Network, Eco Justice, the health programmes, and the youth department.

“We are prepared to resist the current system and paradigm, driven by the economic order that enables and empowers the industries of our world to damage our climate, food, water, and health,” reads the declaration.





## Climate-responsible banking

“The children are not afraid to follow the money”—are adults?

Thirteen-year-old Ellyanne Chlystun-Githae Wanjiku, from Kenya, voiced a clarion call during a May 2023 webinar on climate-responsible banking: “The children are not afraid to follow the money,” she said—and that means learning about responsible banking and influencing policy. “We have nothing against businesses—after all, our parents work there!” she said. “We are just asking for sustainable investment.”

The webinar “Save Children’s Lives—Responsible Banking Survival Guide for Faith Actors & Partners: How to Use Our Power as Bank Clients to Stop Carbon Bombs” gathered more than 300 participants.

The event, co-planned by the World Council of Churches, UNEP, Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities, and the Laudato Si’ Movement, was an action-oriented seminar for children’s and future generations’ survival, considering the latest facts shared by the world’s leading scientists.

## Protecting children’s lives

The WCC’s work to protect children from the harmful effects of climate change also took the form of a submission to the Assembly of State Parties to the International Criminal Court in December 2023, in which the WCC urged the creation of a better legal framework to address climate change disinformation.

The submission was made in follow-up to the outcomes of COP28 and in the context of the then-ongoing meeting of the ICC Assembly of State Parties.

“The main goal of the submission is to save children’s lives,” said WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, who signed the submission on behalf of the WCC.

“In summary, the WCC submits that the limitations in the current international criminal framework contribute to the problem of impunity for deliberate acts of disinformation that imperil hundreds of millions of people globally, especially members of vulnerable communities,” Rev. Pillay stated. “Those who are found responsible for knowingly contributing to these impacts should be held accountable in the international arena for such morally reprehensible and globally destructive conduct.”

The WCC also shared resources globally to extend the reach of child protection. For example, in October 2023, the WCC shared resources with Korean Christians on climate-responsible banking for children.

These resources were shared during a conference organized by the Korean Theology Forum on “The Response of the WCC to the Climate Crisis and Its Policy for Carbon Neutrality” for the formation of church leaders, pastors, and students interested in ways to connect local activities to the global horizon. The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of the Republic of Korea sponsored the conference.



PHOTO: PAUL JEFFREY/LIFE ON EARTH PICTURES

## Seven Weeks for Water

Seven Weeks for Water is an annual Lenten campaign organized by the WCC Ecumenical Water Network. It features reflections on biblical passages, calls to action, and commemorating World Water Day (22 March), which always falls during Lent. In 2023, the WCC took a global approach to the annual Seven Weeks for Water campaign by republishing Bible studies from many different regions. Since the campaign was launched in 2008, the WCC has collected a repository of over 100 Bible studies on water justice in four languages.

## GEM School

The GEM School—or Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics, and Management for an Economy of Life—is co-organized by the World Council of Churches, World Communion of Reformed Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Methodist Council, and Council for World Mission. The GEM School responds to recommendations outlined in the São Paulo Statement: “International Financial Transformation for an Economy of Life” and in the document “Economy of Life for All Now: An Ecumenical Action Plan for a New International Financial and Economic Architecture,” which identified as a priority the development of competencies in economics within churches.

The sixth edition of the GEM School was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia—a city of socioeconomic contrasts—in August and September 2023, gathering 24 participants to rethink economic systems for a more equitable, sustainable planet.



Participants came from more than 20 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, and the Pacific. They included church leaders, pastors, and theological students, as well as finance experts, economic justice advocates, and eco-activists, to promote intergenerational and multidisciplinary dialogue and learning.

## **Regional ecumenical organizations**

Regional ecumenical organizations are essential WCC partners. During 2023, regional assemblies and initiatives strengthened justice, reconciliation, and peace in ways that are still reverberating across the globe.

The WCC engaged in many consultations, webinars, joint messages, and other efforts with regional ecumenical organizations.

### **All Africa Conference of Churches**

The All Africa Conference of Churches convened its Twelfth General Assembly in Abuja, Nigeria, in November 2023 under the theme “The Love of Christ Compels Us...”

The assembly brought together African ecumenists to pray together, evaluate the life and work of the churches in Africa, celebrate key milestones reached, and set the agenda of Africa’s ecumenical movement during the period leading to the next assembly. Those gathered also commemorated the 60th anniversary of the All Africa Conference of Churches.

WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay sent a hearty congratulations to the All Africa Conference of Churches on its 60th anniversary.

“You are the spearhead of ecumenical engagement on the continent and the focal point of ecumenical collaboration for Africa’s future,” said Pillay. “Through the years, you have also been harnessing the strength and determination of postcolonial Africa’s faith communities to ensure a more vibrant future for the continent.”

Over 600 delegates from 43 African countries participated in this assembly, joined by other ecumenical leaders from all over the world.

### **Conference of European Churches**

WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay shared greetings to the Conference of European Churches 16th General Assembly, which took place in Tallinn, Estonia, under the theme “Under God’s blessing – shaping the future.”

Pillay expressed appreciation for the Conference of European Churches’ contribution to the WCC 11th Assembly.

“Despite many difficulties on the way that led to our gathering in Karlsruhe, the WCC 11th Assembly made clear the deep commitment to the goal of visible unity, and a renewed focus on ecumenical spirituality and on ecclesiology that begins with baptism,” reads the WCC message. “What do Europe’s churches have to offer today? This question is in your hands.”

### **Christian Conference of Asia**

WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay traveled to India in September and October 2023 in conjunction with the 15th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, and for visits with WCC member churches.

He opened the Christian Conference of Asia assembly with a special “Lighting the Lamp” ceremony as he offered an inaugural message. Pillay also gave a thematic address as part of a plenary session, and attended other assembly sessions, including one on “Dwelling in Harmony with Creation.”

Pillay met with participants of the WCC-Christian Conference of Asia South Asia Consultation on Ecumenical *Diakonia*. He also met with 100 participants of the Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly at Vijayapuram Diocese Conference Centre.

## Pacific Conference of Churches

The Pacific Conference of Churches held its 12th General Assembly in November in Kanaky, New Caledonia.

WCC president from the Pacific Rev. François Pihaatae was one of the speakers at the opening plenary, which convened under the theme “Do Kamo: Khrist, transform us into your new humanity.”

Phiaatae, of the Maòhi Protestant Church, is from Maohi Nui (French Polynesia) and is an ordained minister of the Etäretia Porotetani Mäöhi (Mäöhi Protestant Church).

The thematic plenaries had a strong focus on climate justice, bringing themes such as “Transformation as Ecological Stewardship.” Plenary themes also include “Transformation as Ecumenical Fellowship,” “Transformation as Self Determination,” and “Children as God’s Precious Gifts: Transformation as Child Protection and Empowerment.”

## Visits to member churches

WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, Türkiye, in March 2023. It was his first official visit to a member church since assuming his duties as WCC general secretary. Recognizing the enduring relationship between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the WCC fellowship of churches, Pillay said: “We are deeply determined to work together for unity and reconciliation regardless of the challenges of the times, with the Gospel at the core and as the foundation of this common commitment, with courage, sharing our witness for the care of God’s creation.”

In March 2023, Pillay also visited the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul, Turkey. His Beatitude, Archbishop Sahak Mashalyan, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, welcomed the WCC general secretary and congratulated him on his election.



PHOTO: NIKOLAOS PAPACHRISTOU/EP PRESS

In March 2023, a WCC delegation met with organizations in Rome that, as the WCC general secretary said, “keep the fire of ecumenism burning.” The delegation visited the Centro Pro Unione and the Methodist Ecumenical Office, and with several representatives from the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy.

In April 2023, Pillay attended the 29th General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in India, where he delivered the keynote address in what marked his first visit to India as WCC general secretary. There are nine WCC member churches in India, all of which were present at the assembly. Pillay listened to the joys and struggles of Indian churches and expressed solidarity with Christians in India amidst their challenges.

The WCC general secretary also visited Sri Lanka in April 2023. It was the first WCC visit since the “living letters” visits of late 2000. Pillay met with the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, heads of churches, theologians, and government officials to discuss their deep contribution to the ecumenical movement.

In May 2023 in Moscow, Pillay met with H.H. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, and representatives from the largest WCC member church.

In July 2023, a WCC delegation led by the general secretary visited New York City and Washington, D.C., with the goal of strengthening collaboration and partnerships. The delegation met some member churches, ecumenical and interfaith partners, as well as representatives of United Nations agencies.

Later in the year, Pillay met again with church leaders in India. During his travels, which stretched from 26 September to 3 October 2023, he was received by the leadership and synods of WCC member churches in



the region, including the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in India, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Church of South India, and Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church. Seminary visits were also on Pillay's agenda, including the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary in Kottayam, Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary, Asian Ecumenical Institute at the Thomas Mar Athanasius Memorial Research and Orientation Centre, and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary. He also participated and addressed thousands of devotees at a church pilgrimage festival at the Marthoman Cheriyapally, an ancient Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in Kothamangalam.

Pillay concluded that he was deeply impressed with WCC member churches from Asia in many ways. "The depth of their spirituality, diversity, ability to work together, and their desire to work with the WCC will be an essential part of our global and contextual work together," he said.

### **Walking, praying, working together**

During a visit with Pope Francis in Rome on 23 March 2023, a WCC delegation led by Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, WCC central committee moderator, and Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, WCC general secretary, committed to walking, praying, and working together for justice, reconciliation, and unity. The ongoing work builds on former leaders and member churches that have helped the global fellowship's strategic plan for the next eight years focus on unity, vision, justice, peace, and making the world a better place for all humans and all creation.

The WCC also offered a greeting for a "Together: Gathering of the People of God" event in Rome in September and October 2023.



The WCC was among more than 60 partners preparing for hosting the event, during which young people gathered, and those around the world gathered with them in spirit, through prayer and Christian unity.

"Together" took place before a synodal assembly for the Catholic Church.

"As brothers and sisters of several Christian denominations will come together in prayer, we will reaffirm together the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ who prayed in John 17 that we may be one so that the world may believe," said the WCC message. "The WCC has been associated with the preparation of the 'Together' project, specially through our Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement programme."

The message added: "The 'Together' event will convene us in Rome, and globally online, to reaffirm Christian unity to strengthen our witness in an increasingly polarising world. It is my hope that the 'Together' prayers inspire us to not do alone what we can do together, locally and globally."



## Working with the UN

From public letters to symposia, from collaborative work to side events, the WCC in 2023 strengthened its relationships with UN bodies and with non-governmental organizations.

### Global call for fair redistribution of wealth and social protection

In a letter to the United Nations General Assembly, the World Council of Churches joined other global Christian organizations in reiterating a call for a New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA).

“In a world confronting multiple crises, the cost of

living crisis, the pushback on democracy, human rights and gender justice, and the climate emergency, the need for financial resources has never been more crucial,” reads the letter. “However, the prevailing profit-driven international financial and tax system systematically diverts resources to the already wealthy and powerful, aggravating inequalities and damaging our increasingly fragile ecosystems.”

## **Symposium exploring how religious communities can be agents of change**

More than 600 people attended the Ninth Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and Faith-Based Organizations in International Affairs, held online in January 2023. Exploring the theme “Securing People’s Wellbeing and Planetary Sustainability,” the symposium was organized by the WCC and a coalition of faith-based and UN partners. The event featured UN officials, representatives of international faith-based organizations, and other experts on climate change, disarmament, and other relevant topics.

## **Commission on the Status of Women**

The 67th Commission on the Status of Women took place in March 2023 in New York City and online. The WCC was involved in online side events that explored the theme “Innovation and Technological Change, Education in the Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality, and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls.”

## **Exploring even stronger relationships**

The Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) celebrated its 75th anniversary. It held a webinar in New York City on 27 October entitled “UN-NGO Relations: Enhancing Multilateralism, Protecting NGO Access, Civic Space, and Democratic Discourse.”

WCC representatives commemorated the 75th anniversary of CoNGO and joined in taking stock of accomplishments and envisioning future work.

The WCC, with civil society groups, reiterated its shared commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which commemorated its 75th anniversary as well.

## **UN Water Conference 2023**

The WCC Ecumenical Water Network joined with the People’s Water Forum and participated at the UN Water Conference in March 2023 at the UN headquarters in New York. WCC EWN organized many side events at the UN Water Conference and successfully presented a Water Justice Manifesto at the conference, signed by over 500 organisations and over half a million individuals through a petition on Avaaz.org. This was a landmark advocacy work that brought the water justice agenda to the core of the UN Water Conference.



# Combatting racism, discrimination, and inequality

## Increasing wellness and wellbeing

Crosscutting through many WCC programmes is work for equality, justice, and the end of stigma—and promoting health and wellbeing.

## Addressing racism

The WCC hosted or cohosted more than a dozen webinars that addressed racism across the globe. From exploring how to reach zero discrimination on work and descent to remembering the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, speakers and participants addressed racism both practically and prayerfully. They came forth with many opportunities and strategies for combatting racism, as well as new insights into the obstacles.

## Disability-inclusive climate action

The WCC Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network hosted a two-day national dialogue in Burundi in June 2023.

This significant event focused on fostering disability -inclusive climate change policies and programs in the country. The dialogue was a pivotal component of the “Her Resilience Enabled Project,” which aims to enhance the resilience of women and girls with disabilities to climate change impacts in both Burundi and Rwanda.

## Eradicating HIV stigma and discrimination

The WCC, through the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy programmes, explored ideas for eradicating

HIV stigma and discrimination—and how churches might be able to bring justice for vulnerable people.

Through a Framework for Dialogue, the WCC built creative synergies among faith-based groups, civil society, young people, and the health sector to analyze the evidence of HIV stigma and to develop joint action plans.

During a webinar on World AIDS Day, the WCC launched two new tools to invigorate the HIV response by the faith sector.

The first tool was “Recommended Practices to Combat HIV-Related Stigma: A Guidebook for Local Faith Communities.” This publication presents the experiences of local congregations responding to HIV stigma.

The second tool was “Faith Sector Implementation of the Global AIDS Strategy.” As the HIV epidemic continues to present a challenge for today’s world, the engagement and action of faith communities, in coordination with other actors, are crucial to realizing the goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

## Food and debt crisis

The WCC cohosted an online consultation in April 2023 to address the pressing issue of the converging food and debt crises. The event invited churches, ecumenical partners, and civil society allies to examine the intersections and roots of these crises and seek collective guidance on possible joint responses.

Speakers endeavoured to understand the key interlinked developments of food insecurity, debt, and bank collapse and how faith communities can continue to be informed and strengthened in the face of these challenges.

Closing the consultation, Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock, executive for Justice and Witness of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, reflected that the question on the speakers' minds was: what or is there even a theology of food?

"What we do know from our own contexts and situations is that food is not just about providing nourishment to our bodies so that we can sustain ourselves for another day—but it also forms how societies themselves are organized," he said. "For us, as Christians, food has a very deep theological meaning."

### **Weekend of Prayer and Action in response to global hunger crisis**

Responding to global crises such as conflicts, pandemic aftereffects, and the pressing challenges of climate change, the World Council of Churches, with ecumenical organizations and partners, organized a Weekend of Prayer and Action against Hunger in October 2023. With 258 million people in 58 countries facing severe hunger in 2022, the need to act is critical.

The prayer resources were based on the "10 Commandments of Food" developed by the WCC and adapted into a child-friendly version by ecumenical partners.

*"The recently released Global Report on Food Crises 2023 documents the rise in the number of people experiencing acute food insecurity and requiring urgent food and livelihood assistance ... It indicates that over a quarter of a billion people are facing acute hunger, with economic shocks and the war in Ukraine contributing to the increase."*

**—From May 2023 WCC executive committee statement**



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

## World Mental Health Day

The World Council of Churches, the World Health Organization, the World Federation for Mental Health, the World Psychiatric Association, and other partners hosted a webinar in October 2023 to commemorate World Mental Health Day.

World Mental Health Day is dedicated to drawing attention to the importance of mental wellbeing and to highlighting areas of particular need and bottlenecks. The theme for 2023 was “Mental Health Is a Universal Human Right.” The webinar explored options for collaboration between churches, Christian institutions, and professional organizations on mental health.

The webinar drew more than 60 participants from Christian health associations, Christian health

organizations, church health programmes, regional ecumenical organizations, and more.

The World Federation for Mental Health celebrated its 75th anniversary and its strong partnership with WCC during a seminar in November 2023.

Titled “75 Years of Mental Health Advocacy: Achievements, Challenges, and the Future,” the seminar drew more than 1,000 people online.



PHOTO: IVARS KUPCIS/WCC



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

## Green Village

### Development with a vision

The Green Village is a development project that will soon become the new site for the WCC and its partners.

During 2023, the WCC celebrated the construction sites for the buildings dubbed Kyoto and Montreal in Green Village.

André Wyss, the CEO of Implenia, the organisation planning and constructing the new Kyoto office building in the Green Village, visited the Green Village in October 2023 with members of the WCC and Implenia management teams.

After the visit, WCC general secretary Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay said, "It was really good to see the top leaders

of Implenia visit and inspect the Green Village project and site." Pillay concluded, "This is, indeed, a massive endeavour for the WCC that takes very seriously environmental issues and sustainability—something that is most needed in the current context of a climate crisis."

The Green Village has been named a One Planet Living leader by Bioregional, a designation that reflects sustainable aspects of life and work. Additionally, the Montreal building of Green Village was awarded third place in its category at the 2023 Romandy Real Estate Awards.

In December 2023, the WCC executive committee met to continue discussions on the Green Village, particularly the Lima building, which will house the offices the WCC will rent to sister organizations and tenants.

# Working for peace. Expressing solidarity. Praying together.



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

## Ukraine

On the day marking a full year since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, WCC moderator of the central committee Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm and WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay released a message that marked the day with deep sadness, denounced the ongoing invasion, and called for the cessation of war.

“Indeed, the fundamental basis of international humanitarian and human rights law—and the UN Charter itself—has been challenged and undermined by this illegal armed aggression against the people and sovereign state of Ukraine by a permanent member of the UN Security Council,” read the message. “The World Council of Churches denounces the ongoing invasion and all of its tragic and unconscionable consequences.”

The message also noted that there can be no legitimate political, moral, or religious justification for such wholesale destruction of lives, livelihoods, and communities. “We particularly reject any misuse of theology and religious authority that seeks to justify it,” reads the message. “Our God is a God of peace, not of war; of love, not of hate; of reconciliation and unity, not of confrontation and division.”

## Visiting Ukraine

Against the background of the Russian invasion and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, a high-level WCC leadership delegation visited Ukraine in May 2023, undertaking an intensive series of consultations in Kyiv with church leaders, Ukrainian government officials, and others.

During the visit to Ukraine, an ecumenical prayer service was held in Bucha, on the outskirts of Kyiv. The service, led by the WCC leadership, with the participation of members of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (UCCRO), took place at St Andrew Orthodox Church in Bucha.

“We hear the cries of despair, of those who were killed and of those who have seen their loved ones killed,” said Bedford-Strohm during a prayer. “Let us all not surrender to hate but overcome hate by love.”

The WCC general secretary also led a delegation to Moscow, meeting with H.H. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and representatives from the largest WCC member church.

“Consolidation and unity in Ukrainian society, including especially among the majority Christian Orthodox believers, is an obvious necessity in the current circumstances faced by the nation and people of Ukraine,” observed Pillay. “We visited Moscow to discuss engagement also by the Russian Orthodox Church in dialogue on the war and its consequences, including with regard to the deep divisions in the Orthodox family in this context,” Pillay reported, “and I am grateful for H.H. Patriarch Kirill’s commitment to exploring this possibility.”



PHOTO: WCC



PHOTO: WCC



PHOTO: WCC

## Armenia

A WCC delegation visited the Armenian Apostolic Church in September 2023. The visit included an audience with His Holiness Karekin II, the Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians.

The delegation discussed the situation at the Lachin Corridor—the main road that links the region to Armenia—which was blocked for more than nine months, seriously affecting the lives and living conditions of 120,000 people, including children. The humanitarian crisis continued to escalate during 2023 in the blockaded enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh).

Given the terrible situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the continuous struggle for humanitarian aid to reach them, the WCC central committee requested the general secretary to lead a delegation to this troubled part of the world. The visit was intended to express solidarity of the global fellowship, study the situation, establish facts, and consider with the local leaders and people what the WCC could do to address the situation.

A prayer for peace in the region was offered as the delegation visited the 13th-century Armenian monastery Noravank.

A minute from the WCC central committee in June 2023 on Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) recalls previous statements and actions by the WCC and reiterates profound concern about the humanitarian crisis there due to the closure and blockade by Azerbaijan of the Lachin corridor, the only road connecting Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) to Armenia.

The minute calls on Azerbaijan “for the immediate lifting of the blockade and to re-open the Lachin corridor to allow for the two-way free and safe passage

of civilians, transport, and goods along the corridor and to guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access to alleviate the suffering of the Armenian population of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).”

### Reaching the Lachin area

A WCC delegation in Armenia reached the Lachin area in September 2023 and saw humanitarian aid being blocked. This was on the same day Azerbaijan launched attacks against Armenian forces in the region.

In a video message, WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay stood near the bridge connecting the Lachin corridor to Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh). “Just a few hours ago, there have been some shootings that have taken place, and we are told that some soldiers have actually been killed, so we are being prevented from going further,” said Pillay. “We have taken a decision not to proceed because it is a risk, and so we at least are here, and we can partly see certain things, and we know this entire place is blocked.”

In July 2023, the WCC called on Azerbaijan for the immediate lifting of the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, as more than 120,000 people—including 30,000 children—were suffering under an increasingly dire humanitarian crisis.

“As the humanitarian crisis in the blockaded enclave of Nagorno-Karabagh (Artsakh) reaches a tragic level, the World Council of Churches reiterates its statements and positions on the need for urgent and immediate action by the international community,” said Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay. “The Lachin corridor, the only road that links the region to Armenia, has been blocked for more than seven months, sparking a humanitarian emergency and putting the lives of 120,000 people, including children, in great danger.”

As Ambassador Andranik Hovhannisyan, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Armenia to the UN Office, visited in August 2023, the WCC reiterated calls to lift the blockade and re-open the Lachin corridor.

A lightning offensive by Azerbaijan in September 2023 halted negotiations over the corridor and led to a mass exodus of ethnic Armenians from Nogorno-Karabakh. Efforts at mediation were ongoing in February 2024.

## Colombia

### Permanent accompanier in Colombian peace talks

The World Council of Churches (WCC), with the Colombian Episcopal Conference, United Nations Mission in Colombia, and Organization of American States, has been appointed as a permanent accompanier for peace talks with the Estado Mayor Central (EMC) FARC-EP in Colombia.

The process of the peace talks is coordinated by the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace. The WCC will provide accompaniment and, where necessary, leadership and moderation for the negotiators from both sides on behalf of the international ecumenical movement.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay said: “The WCC is involved in many peace initiatives across the globe, and we are pleased to be of service to make the world a better and safe place for all people and creation. This is very much in keeping with our Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity.”

A WCC delegation visited Colombia in December to strengthen accompaniment of the peace process. In a nation marked by decades of alarming numbers of internal displacement and confinement mainly



PHOTO: MARCELO SCHNEIDER/WCC

affecting Indigenous and Afro-Colombians, the walk toward peace is complicated—but the WCC deepened collaboration on Colombia’s vision for total peace.

“It is a great moment to see that the World Council of Churches is doing what it really advocates, what it really calls for, what it really hopes for—and that is greater participation on a broader scale of integration with many different players around the table, whether it is from politics, whether it is from governments, from the humanitarian sector, from faith-based communities—all these different folk coming together to say: how do we find peace in the context of Colombia?” said Pillay, who also spoke before the Colombian Senate and visited firsthand areas affected by conflict.

In Colombia, as he met with representatives of embassies of Switzerland, Norway, Germany, and the diplomatic service of the European Union, Pillay talked about the role of the international community in the country’s peace process.

“Our engagement in Colombia relies both on our strong ties with our local ecumenical partners and the cooperation with the international community,” said Pillay. “This historic moment in which this country puts so much effort in the work for integral peace needs our strong support.”



## Palestine and Israel

### Appealing for immediate ceasefire

The WCC, following closely the developments in Israel and Palestine upon the outbreak of hostilities in October 2023, appealed urgently for an immediate ceasefire—an appeal the WCC reiterated for the rest of 2023 and beyond.

“We are deeply concerned about the imminent risks of spiralling conflict between Israel and Palestinian armed groups and of the inevitably tragic consequences for the people of the region—Israelis and Palestinians alike—following a period of escalating tensions and violence in the West Bank and Jerusalem.”

The WCC evacuated those in the field with the WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment in Palestine and Israel programme and continued their work remotely.

The WCC continued to call for a new approach in Palestine and Israel, as well as urgent humanitarian aid.

“The horrific situation today in Israel and Palestine, leaving so many dead, thousands injured, many families either displaced or living in shelters and hundreds held in captivity and prisons, is exactly what we all feared would happen,” said WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay in October 2023. “It is now thirty years since the Oslo agreement was signed. In the meantime, the number of settlements has grown to at least 250 with 800,000 people.”

Ambassador Ibrahim Khraishi, Mission of Palestine to Switzerland, and Doa Nofal, second secretary at the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, requested an urgent meeting with the WCC in October 2023 to discuss the war in the Holy Land and the current and critical humanitarian situation. Ambassador Khraishi conveyed his appreciation for the WCC’s brave position concerning the dire situation of the Palestinian people in Gaza, as well as its unwavering dedication to pursuing an equitable and righteous peace deal, fostering an environment where both sides live in peace and where

Palestinians are granted their right to freedom, dignity, and self-determination.

The WCC continues to advocate for a ceasefire and increased humanitarian aid in Gaza.

Well before the war broke out in October 2023, the WCC expressed deep concern about increased violence in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel reported in August 2023 that human rights violations had nearly tripled in the past year.

“Violence, collective punishments, and communal attacks can only further damage the prospects of peace and justice for all,” Pillay said in January 2023—nine months before the current war began. The WCC again called for the cessation of violence in the West Bank in July 2023, followed by a visit the same month from

Ambassador Ibrahim Khraishi, Mission of Palestine to Switzerland; Ambassador Dr Omar Awadallah, assistant minister for United Nations and Specialized Organizations; and Doa Nofal, second secretary at the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva to discuss the current situation in Palestine.

In March 2023, the WCC also expressed solidarity with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in calling for the protection of holy sites.

In May 2023, the WCC marked the 75th commemoration of “Al-Nakba,” or “catastrophe”—when hundreds of thousands of people were uprooted during Israel’s creation in 1948. Pillay expressed solidarity with member churches in the Holy Land.



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

## **Global Refugee Forum**

Religious leaders gathered in December 2023 for an event linked to the Global Refugee Forum. Hosted by the UNHCR, the World Council of Churches (WCC), and Religions for Peace at the Ecumenical Centre, the programme was entitled: “Religious Leaders Unite for Climate Peace in Solidarity with Refugees.”

On 12 December, refugees, religious leaders, and UN Refugee Agency representatives gathered during an inter-religious ceremony in the Ecumenical Centre chapel to pray, sing, and listen deeply to one another. Titled “This Is My Story, This Is My History,” the ceremony offered prayers from various traditions, including Buddhist, Jewish, Bahá’í, Muslim, Hindu, and Christian.

Faith-based leaders then released a message to the Global Refugee Forum that underscored their commitment to offering sanctuary for refugees as well as defending their human rights.

## **Ethiopia**

### **Historic show of unity**

With a historic show of unity, Ethiopian churches meeting at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey decided to establish a council of churches in their country.

High-level delegations from the three largest Ethiopian churches—the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, and Ethiopian Catholic Church—made the move to strengthen ecumenical cooperation “in responding to humanitarian needs and in promoting peace and social cohesion in Ethiopia,” according to a minute released by the gathering.

The World Council of Churches served as a convener and facilitator of the process. The German Federal Foreign Office supported the meeting. It built on previous conversations and processes, which Norwegian Church Aid supported.

## **Iraq**

### **“Living Together”**

As a “Living Together” celebration in Bagdad opened in March 2023, religious and ethnic leaders from Iraq celebrated diversity and, at the same time, candidly addressed challenges to inclusive citizenship. They were joined by representatives of Iraqi executive and legislative authorities as well as representatives from UN agencies and embassies.

The consultation, organized by the WCC in partnership with its member churches and partners, followed other WCC-led events supporting the local communities and promoting social cohesion through inter-religious collaboration.

The consultation continued the WCC’s work on promoting inclusive citizenship through education, legislation, and media.

## **Türkiye**

A delegation from the WCC and ACT Alliance visited Türkiye, expressing solidarity and support for churches on the ground responding to grave needs in the wake of the February 2023 earthquake. Visiting communities in southern Türkiye in April 2023, the delegation met with churches in Mersin, Iskenderun, and Antioch, including communities in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople, Latin Catholics, and others.

“The visit is tremendously symbolic during western Holy Week and during the last week of Great Lent in the eastern calendar,” said WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay. “It is really sad to see the devastation and damage brought about by the earthquake in Türkiye. Apart from the destruction of buildings, homes, properties, and churches are the emotional and psychological scars endured by many people who have lost loved ones and almost everything”

## Human Fraternity

WCC general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay attended the 2023 Zayed Award for Human Fraternity ceremony in February 2023 at the Founders Memorial in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

The 2023 awards went to Kenyan activist Shamsa Abubakar Fadhil and the Community of Sant’Egidio, a Catholic lay group.

During the same event, Pillay spoke in a panel discussion at the Global Tolerance and Human Fraternity Summit in Abu Dhabi.

The theme of the summit was “Connected in Our Common Humanity.” Pillay reflected on the theme “Diversity: Acceptance and Understanding.”

Pillay shared that he was deeply impressed with the efforts of the Ministry of Tolerance and Human Fraternity in Abu Dhabi to create peace and good relationships among different religions. “The conference dealt with many practical ways in which religions could work together,” he said. “A special feature is the space created for the Abrahamic religions to be together in one place.”



PHOTO: CUBAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

PHOTO: PETER WILLIAMS

PHOTO: ESTUDIOS REVOLUCIÓN

## Cuba

In December 2023, the WCC general secretary, Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, visited Cuba to reiterate WCC support for the churches and people in Cuba.

He met with Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel at the Palacio de las Convenciones in Havana. “I was deeply impressed with our heart-to-heart meeting with the president of Cuba,” expressed Pillay.

Pillay also offered a lecture at the University of Havana in Cuba entitled “Christians, Cry Out for Peace! The Perils and Promise of Peace Today.”

In a sermon entitled “Being Church Today in a World in Crisis,” offered at the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba, Pillay shared thoughts of hope and transformation.



# Nurturing Spirituality. Allowing Reflection. Seeking Formation.

PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

## The WCC commissions

The commissions of the World Council of Churches serve to inform and advise programmes, guide the spiritual life of the council, and strengthen global relationships, among other functions.

In 2023, the WCC's commissions, newly formed since the WCC 11th Assembly, transitioned into new work, inducted new members, and expressed appreciation for those who served previously. In June 2023, the WCC central committee approved commission bylaws and elected leaders for the WCC commissions.

### Commission on Faith and Order

During 2023, the WCC Commission on Faith and Order welcomed its new director, Dr Andrej Jeftić (Serbian Orthodox Church), following the retirement of Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus. The outgoing commission met online in April for its final meeting at which the outgoing moderator, Rev. Dr Susan Durber said: ““Whatever our differences, however deep the struggles between us and however intractable some of our

divisions may seem to be, we are united in a common and indestructible faith.”

The commission newly elected at the WCC central committee in June 2023 met online in November–December for its first full meeting. It discussed Nicaea 2025—the commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea—which will be marked by the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, to take place in Egypt in October 2025.

A Faith and Order steering group preparing for Nicaea 2025 met at the Château de Bossey in October to develop plans for the world conference, which will meet under the theme “Where now for visible unity?” It will gather church leaders and theologians of different traditions to reaffirm the WCC’s commitment to assisting the churches as they call one another to visible unity and advancing the unity of humanity and of all creation.

Members of the steering group also contributed to a thematic issue of the WCC journal *The Ecumenical Review*, “Commemorating the Council of Nicaea,” published in April.

Since June 2023, a staff planning group mandated by the Staff Leadership Group has worked in tandem with the Faith and Order Commission's Steering Group, which began its planning work in 2019.

During the meeting of the steering group, the moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, Rev Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich, reflected on Nicaea as a written confessional writing that remains a continuing journey of faith for the churches. She said: “2025 will be a milestone in the renewing of the ecumenical vision and work for the unity of the church. . . . the conference will ask what kind of faith we are confessing together.” The conference will explore that question under three themes: Faith, Unity, and Mission.

A new Faith and Order publication, *Towards a Global Vision of the Church*, volume II, was released in December. The book is the second in a two-volume set aimed at broadening the table of ecclesiological dialogue by having wider conversations with regions, church traditions—including evangelical, pentecostal, charismatic, and independent churches – and forms of being church.

### **Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation**

The WCC Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation held its inaugural meeting, the first since the WCC 11th Assembly, in October 2023.

### **Commission on Health and Healing**

The WCC Commission of the Churches on Health and Healing held its inaugural online meeting in October 2023, where 23 of the 26 members participated. The second online meeting on 30 November further developed four working groups to address the priorities: Access and Health Systems, Mental Health,

HIV and Reproductive Health, and Faith Science, in preparation for the face-to-face meeting in 2024 and the commission's continued work. The newly-established commission will foster deeper engagement of WCC member churches in WCC's work on holistic health and healing. It will also assist the council in calling the attention of member churches and ecumenical partners to gaps and challenges on health and diaconal matters and suggest ways Christians may act effectively upon those issues in their respective communities.

### **Commission on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development**

In June 2023, the WCC central committee adopted bylaws for a new Commission on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development proposed by the WCC 11th Assembly.

The bylaws were developed with reference to other WCC commission bylaws based on best practices.

The central committee also asked “the general secretary to inform the member churches about the creation of a new commission and request nominations.”

In November 2023, the executive committee appointed the Commission of the Churches on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development. The executive committee also noted the composition of the commission, according to its bylaws, including member churches and ecumenical partners with the significant participation of young people and Indigenous Peoples.

### **Commission on World Mission and Evangelism**

The WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism began meeting online in October 2023, rooted in the vision of the “Arusha Call to Transforming Discipleship.” The commission, constituted by the

WCC central committee in June, convened with the understanding that discipleship is both an individual and community calling.

The commission's planning group also met in November 2023, praying together and envisioning the future, focusing on the WCC Strategic Plan.

Rev. Michael Blair, moderator of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, affirmed the role of decolonial work as "a critical foundation for the work of the commission going forward" that "has the potential of helping member churches and civil societies wanting to engage the work of repairing historical harms to accompany each other in order to transform communities into places of healing and wholeness."

### **Commission of the Churches on International Affairs**

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs continued to represent the WCC in global affairs.

Deeply involved in delegations that visited Ukraine, Moscow, Armenia, and other nations, the commission articulated the WCC's ongoing calls for justice, reconciliation, and unity.

The commission was involved in many UN-related meetings and offered input to articulate the UN's "New Agenda for Peace."

The commission also continued its longstanding relationships with member churches across the world, from calling for the protection of human rights in the Philippines to praying for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula to urging a nuclear weapons-free world.

The WCC marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with a public statement

acknowledging the shared values that underpin both the declaration and the WCC, marking its own 75th year in existence.

*"At the same time, we acknowledge the many ways and places in which God-given human dignity is threatened and imperilled, by resurgent authoritarian repression of freedoms, by conflict, occupation and forced displacement, by discrimination and prejudice, by persecution, by rampant economic inequality and persistent extreme poverty, by violent extremism, by social media misinformation and hate speech, by the abuse of artificial intelligence and other new technologies, and by anthropogenic climate change and the lack of climate justice.*

**—From a WCC central committee statement, June 2023**

### **Young People in the Ecumenical Movement Commission**

In its June 2023 meeting, the central committee, in its business proceedings, appointed 17 youth advisors to a 2023-2030 term. They will endeavour to strengthen the voice of young people in the work of the central committee.

Every proposed youth advisor was either a participant at the WCC 11th Assembly or was nominated by their church for the Young People in the Ecumenical Movement Commission.

## **Emerging Peacemakers Forum: “Go out and be disciples and children of God”**

Fifty young people from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe—the youngest being 20—celebrated two weeks of collaboration, dialogue, and insight at the Emerging Peacemakers Forum in July 2023.

The forum was organized in partnership between the Muslim Council of Elders, the World Council of Churches, and the Rose Castle Foundation.

WCC’s general secretary, Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, concluded that the actual value of what graduates have gained will bear fruit in how they put it into practice. “It’s what you do with what you have received,” he said. “Go out and be disciples and children of God, working with God to transform and heal a broken and suffering world.”

Judge Mohamed Abdelsalam, secretary-general of the Muslim Council of Elders, affirmed that the forum aims to “create a small space for young people to talk and speak up and then for the older ones, the leaders, to listen.”

“We are convinced that our faith tradition, our cultural traditions, and our understanding of how we are different, not just how we’re the same, are really important ingredients for sustainable peace,” said Canon Sarah Snyder, founding director of Rose Castle Foundation.

Filippo Grandi, United Nations high commissioner for Refugees, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, also shared messages with the Emerging Peacemakers Forum, which concluded with a tree-planting ceremony in the leadup to COP28.



# Communicating prophetically

Communication from the WCC in 2023 involved prophetic storytelling and growing channels to highlight justice, reconciliation, and unity across the world.

Voices and visits from young people, news from WCC member churches, and stories of challenges and hopes rang through WCC communications.

## A growing audience

In 2023, the WCC website attracted 1.5 million visitors worldwide. With 185,000 visits, January was the month the website was visited most, as many readers clicked on news and resources related to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

With an average of 70 news articles published online monthly, the WCC published more than 800 articles in 2023, including news, feature stories, and interviews.

WCC's social media channels saw an increase in their online audience, with the total number of fans and followers across all channels rising from 93,000 in 2022 to 97,000 in 2023. Instagram showed the most growth, adding 2,000 new followers due to the several campaigns and dedicated material published on the channel.

During the WCC central committee in June 2023, the WCC Instagram and YouTube channels carried observations and inspiration from young people in a customized, dedicated effort to encourage input from younger generations.





PHOTO: GREGOIRE DE FROMBELL/WCC



PHOTO: WCC



PHOTO: GREGOIRE DE FROMBELL/WCC

The WCC observed annual commemorations that drew the fellowship together to pray, serve, and act.

### **16 Days against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence**

The campaign, 16 Days against Gender-Based Violence, began on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and ended on Human Rights Day.

Working with member churches and ecumenical partners, the WCC highlighted ecumenical action and advocacy together for gender justice with webinars, gatherings, and prayer.

### **Liturgy for World AIDS Day**

With the theme, “Let Communities Lead!” the WCC developed a liturgy with the Lutheran World Federation for World AIDS Day. The liturgy reminded us that the world can end HIV and AIDS with communities leading the way. Organizations of communities living with, at risk of, or affected by HIV are the frontline of progress in the HIV response. The prayers and reflections are a call to action to enable and support communities in their leadership roles.

A reflection asked: “In our congregations and our faith communities, what role do we give communities who are affected and are vulnerable to acquiring HIV? Is their role in overcoming HIV acknowledged, affirmed, and supported?”

### **Blessing of the Waters**

As the WCC staff and partners gathered in January 2023, they observed the annual Blessing of the Waters, which, according to Orthodox tradition, celebrates the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River.

## Journals and publications

The WCC continued with the production of three journals, which are published on its behalf by Wiley: *The Ecumenical Review*, *International Review of Mission*, and *Current Dialogue*. In 2023, *The Ecumenical Review* and *International Review of Mission* included articles that looked back to the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. *The Ecumenical Review* also included a thematic issue looking to the 1700th anniversary in 2025 of the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea, a pivotal moment in the history of Christian faith.

A thematic issue of the *International Review of Mission* focused on the decolonial task for ecumenical mission today, highlighting the need for repentance, reparation, and restorative justice. *Current Dialogue* tackled the issue of Interreligious Engagement and Gender Justice.

In 2023, the WCC finalized 20 publications, including completing a mission centenary series, reports of the WCC 11th Assembly, several HIV response resources, and an *Ecumenical International Youth Day Toolkit*, among many others.

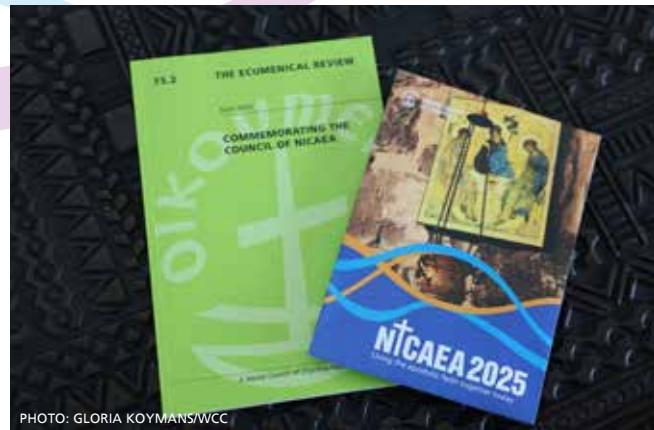


PHOTO: GLORIA KOYMANS/WCC

## Digital justice

*“Concerns about this type of technology have been longstanding in the ecumenical movement. The central committee affirms the concerns expressed by many regarding the absence of effective regulation of the accelerating development of a technology with such vast acknowledged potential for harm as well as for good.”*

—From a WCC central committee statement, June 2023

In an era in which artificial intelligence has offered both unprecedented opportunities and challenges, digital justice was often a topic for WCC webinars, strategic planning, and publications.

*Digital Justice: A Study and Action Guide* became newly available in French and Spanish in September 2023, widening access for even more people who want to learn more about being a digital advocate and bridging the digital divide.



PHOTO: GRÉGOIRE DE FOMBELLE/WCC

## Geneva Engage Award

The WCC received a top honour from Geneva Engage for its online engagement with the world via social media.

Geneva Engage examines Geneva's global footprint by looking at the social media engagement of Geneva-based organizations and Geneva's web relevance and online meetings.

Ultimately, Geneva Engage examines the links between International Geneva and communities from around the world that are affected by the policies discussed and negotiated in Geneva in areas such as development, human rights, and digital issues.

WCC moderator Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm expressed great joy about the award. "Communication is crucial for our global network of churches to be a source of peace and reconciliation in a fragile and



PHOTO: WCC

divided world," he said. "As churches, we are deeply rooted in the local communities all over the world and yet all share the universal vision of a world in which all human beings can live in dignity and in respect of each other and of nature."

## WCC shows resilience after ransomware attack

In December 2023, WCC communications systems were hacked by a ransomware group.

As the WCC IT Team worked hard to restore all the systems, including the WCC website, the WCC continued to find ways to communicate with hope and peace. WCC general secretary, Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, said he is more convinced than ever that a strong voice for digital justice is needed. "In pursuit of technological progress, human beings cannot misuse these for personal gains," he said.

# WCC financial results 2023

The preliminary, unaudited, financial statements for 2023 represent a regular year, which is in contrast to a significantly different financial profile in 2022. This difference is because of two major events that occurred in 2022: the WCC 11th Assembly, which brought in CHF 9.2 million in income and incurred CHF 11.7 million in costs, and the sale of the land plot for the Kyoto building, which amounted to CHF 30.1 million in revenue.

For 2023, the council reports a net increase in funds of CHF 2.2 million and general reserves at CHF 7.8 million, above the target of CHF 7 million.

Memberships and programme contributions were CHF 14.1 million, which is CHF 1.4 million less than the previous year. The main reasons for this reduction are the decline in funding received for Syria, the reduced

activity right after the assembly year (e.g., GETI), and the negative impact on foreign exchange rates due to the strengthening of the Swiss franc against other currencies.

Investments and currency gains of CHF 0.7 million were earned in 2023, compared to losses in 2022. The improvement mainly reflects the positive turn of the global economy and the financial markets.

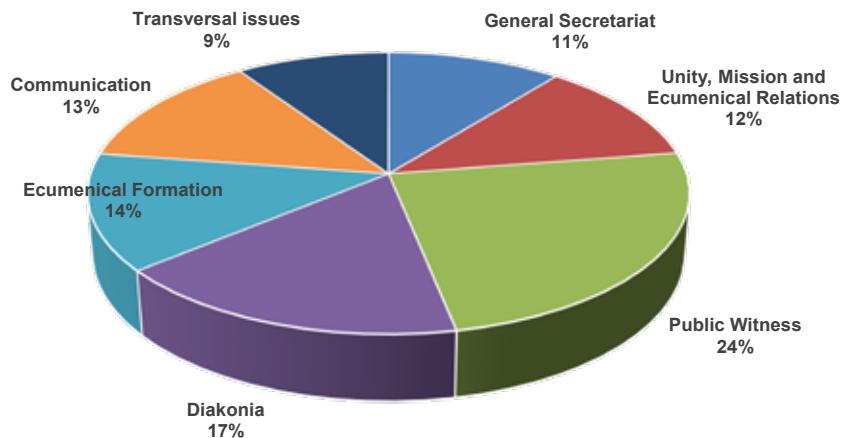
The total revenue generated from rental income and sales was CHF 9.9 million, which is an increase of CHF 3.8 million compared to the previous year. This increase is attributed to proceeds generated from the Green Village project, along with the savings made during the construction of the Montreal building and the car park infrastructure.



PHOTO: ALBIN HILLERT/WCC

FINANCIAL RESULTS 2023 (Swiss francs 000's)*	Unrestricted and des-ignated funds		Restricted funds	Total funds	Total funds
	2023	2023	2023	2023	2022
*Unaudited					
<b>Income</b>					
Membership and other unrestricted contributions	3,526	–	3,526	3,565	
Programme contributions	–	10,544	10,544	11,913	
Assembly total income		181	181	9,164	
Investment and currency (losses)/gains	204	519	723	(2,078)	
Rental income, sales and other income	9,764	106	9,870	6,050	
Miscellaneous income	195	108	303	593	
Gain on sale of land	–	–	–	30,122	
Unrestricted income distribution	(3,525)	3,525	–	–	
<b>Total income</b>	<b>10,164</b>	<b>14,983</b>	<b>25,147</b>	<b>59,329</b>	
<b>Expenditure</b>					
Programme and other operating costs	4,904	4,076	8,980	16,126	
Assembly total expenditure		187	187	11,668	
Depreciation	1,885	155	2,040	2,032	
Salaries	3,767	7,491	11,258	12,025	
Taxation	495	6	501	2,418	
Redistribution of costs; internal (sales)/charges	(2,777)	2,777	–	–	
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>8,274</b>	<b>14,692</b>	<b>22,966</b>	<b>44,269</b>	
Transfers between funds	–	–	–	–	
Transfers to funds			–		
<b>Net surplus for the year</b>	<b>1,890</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>2,181</b>	<b>15,060</b>	

Income trends (Swiss francs 000's)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Membership & other unrestricted contributions	3,928	3,916	4,040	3,947	3,563	3,696	3,565	3,526
Programme contributions	13,542	13,372	13,895	13,431	10,993	11,305	11,913	10,544
Assembly	55	68	73	378	296	1,139	9,164	181
Other income	7,483	8,074	6,765	8,415	6,170	5,873	4,565	10,896
Gain on sale of land	–	–	–	3,483	18,948	–	30,122	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,008</b>	<b>25,430</b>	<b>24,773</b>	<b>29,654</b>	<b>39,970</b>	<b>22,013</b>	<b>59,329</b>	<b>25,147</b>



#### WCC expenditure by programme 2023

CHF 000's

%

General Secretariat	1,547	11%
Unity, Mission and Ecumenical Relations	1,713	12%
Public Witness	3,514	24%
Diakonia	2,470	17%
Ecumenical Formation	1,942	13%
Communication	1,914	13%
Transversal issues	1,361	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,461</b>	<b>100%</b>

Transversal issues in 2023 included Church and Ecumenical Relations, Youth Engagement in the Ecumenical Movement, Just Community of Women and Men, Inter-religious Dialogue and Co-operation, Spiritual Life, and Overcoming Racism.

## FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTORS 2023

### Main contributors

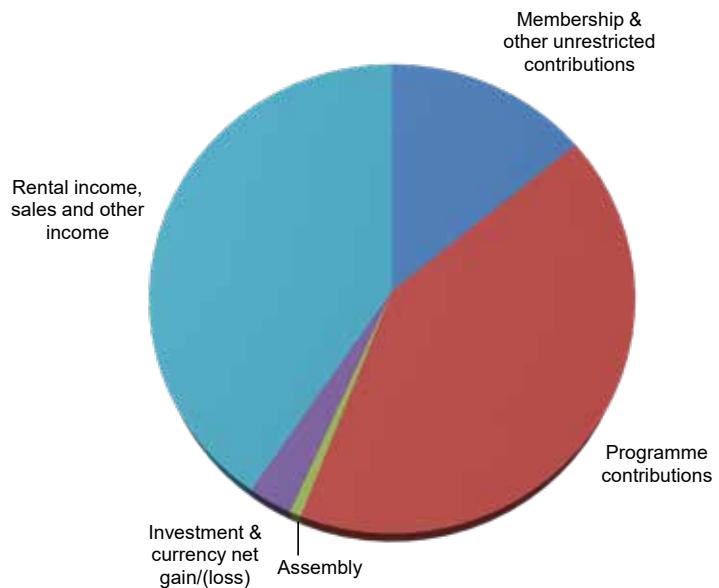
Note: The list includes member churches, ecumenical partners and other organizations that contributed more than CHF 20,000 to the WCC in 2023.

Act for Peace, African Methodist Episcopal Church, American Baptist Churches USA, Amity Foundation, Anglican Church of Canada, Bread for the World, Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration, Christian Aid, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States, Christian Council of Sweden, Church of England, Church of Norway, Church of Scotland, Church of Sweden, Council for World Mission, DanChurchAid, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, Eglise protestante unie de France, EKD - Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, EKD - Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau, EKD - Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland, European Commission, FELM, Finn Church Aid, Foundation for Theological Education in Asia and the Pacific, Fondation pour l'aide au protestantisme réformé,

German Federal Foreign Office, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Kerk in Actie, Norwegian Church Aid, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Presbyterian Church (USA), Presbyterian Church in Canada, Presbyterian Church of Korea, Protestant Church in Switzerland, Protestant Church in the Netherlands, Ref. Kirchgemeinde Aarau, Religious Society of Friends, Stichting Rotterdam, Swiss Church Aid (HEKS-EPER), the Episcopal Church, UNAIDS, United Church of Canada, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Uniting Church in Australia, Uniting Church in Sweden, World Communion of Reformed Churches.

#### **Other contributors (less than CHF 20,000)**

Member churches, ecumenical partners, other organizations, congregations, and individuals.



WCC sources of income 2023	CHF 000's	%
Membership & other unrestricted contributions	3,526	14.0%
Programme contributions	10,544	41.9%
Assembly	181	0.7%
Investment & currency net gain/(loss)	723	2.9%
Rental income, sales and other income	10,173	40.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,147</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Rental income and other sales include CHF 3.8 million of accrued income recognized in Q4 related to economies of construction from the Green Village project.



# World Council of Churches

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