

Moderator's Report

Commission on World Mission and Evangelism

July 2025, Nairobi, Kenya

*When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Sometimes you're made to feel as if your love's a crime --
But nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight --
Got to kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight
When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Lovers in a dangerous time
And we're lovers in a dangerous time
Lovers in a dangerous time*

These words form the song *Lovers in a Dangerous Time*, by the Canadian social prophet, Bruce Cockburn express something of the mood and posture of the work of the Commission this season. This song, from 1984 is set against the background of the world's crises and injustices, and juxtaposes the experience of two young students engaging in their affection for each other. It is rooted in a commitment to making meaning in a way that invites us to imagine an alternative active hope that has to "kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight."

As such, the work of the Commission invites us to hold the tension between mission theology and mission praxis that is rooted in hope and transformation.

As the Commission meets face-to-face for the first time since the Assembly, it is important that we appreciate that we stand in the tradition of well over 100 years of mission engagement from 1910-2017. We will build on the work of previous Commissions, Mission Conferences, and Assemblies. At the same time, we recognize that we need to express in new ways what it means to be co-partners with God in God's activity in the world that is relevant for "such a time as this."

The Continuing Committee from the last Commission identified the needs to deepen the engagement with the Mission from the Margins theme from *Together Towards Life* (2013). The committee recognized that there needs to be a shift from talking about location (margins-center) to the engaging with the forces that marginalize. This was further reinforced by Ecumenical Conversation 2 (*Dreaming a New Future: A Call from the Margins*) from the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany in 2022. The committee also suggested that work needed to continue on the theme of *Transforming Discipleship* from the Arusha Call, as well as a focus on racism and decolonization. These themes will continue to shape the imagination of the Commission. The Program Guidelines Committee from the WCC 11th Assembly, has reinforced the themes suggested by the Continuation Committee and has suggested a focus on unity and mission:

- a. *The Arusha Call*
- b. *Models of Mission as reparation and reconciliation*
- c. *Next World Mission Conference (2028) and participate in the Faith & Order Nicaea 2025*

d. *Identify activities which unmask and resist named marginalizing forces*

The Assembly also identified that work on decolonization should be a critical focus of the programmatic work of the Secretariat.

“Many voices have been raised in our gathering naming the continuing legacies and impacts of the transatlantic slave trade and colonisation which drive the interrelated ecological, economic racial and gender injustices of today. Institutions and communities are caught in oppressive systems rooted in colonisation. African and African descendent people, Indigenous people, Dalits, other marginalized and racialized people, and the earth herself bear the trauma most and live always with its heaviest burden. These are systems many of our churches and mission societies developed and perpetuated and have not yet repaired, repented, or addressed reparations. To fully seek the unity and mission of the church, colonisation and systemic injustices must be addressed and our models of mission and unity framed to bring reparation and reconciliation.” Report of the Programme Guidelines Committee, Karlsruhe Assembly

The Commission will pay particular attention to this work on decolonization consistent with the WCC Strategic Plan, *“Enhanced understanding of decolonizing discourses on mission and evangelism and Mission from the Margins as orientation for ecumenical missiology that contributes to reconciliation, visible unity, common witness, and diakonia.”*

Program

The post-COVID reality, both in the advancement of use of technology and the challenges of financial resources, in many ways has been a gift. It has meant that we are having to do the work differently. During the life of this Commission, we will seek to explore and learn together how to work in the virtual space as well as in face-to-face gatherings. We welcome any learnings from our membership as to how to continually build our experience of meeting. As we engage together, we will meet in a number of different ways – in regional groupings, in working groups (we have identified three) and as the Commission as a whole.

Building on the theme of Transforming Discipleship, the Commission will focus on three areas, supported by three working groups

- (a) Decolonizing discipleship: evangelism in praxis: The working group will focus on exploring how evangelism in practice announces and witnesses to the Gospel’s power to bring hope in times of crisis and challenge.
- (b) Decolonizing discipleship: mission as reparative justice: The working group will focus on deepening ecumenical mission theology as a reparative force against the legacies of colonisation and the powers of domination and marginalisation.
- (c) Decolonizing Discipleship: praxes and spiritualities: The working group will focus on communities of transformation and the witness and wisdom they bring to reshape mission praxes.

We will build on the resources such as Together Towards Life, The Gift of Being and Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World among others.

Partnership

A key strategic framework for our work will be *partnership*. As we move forward with the work, we are committed to work in partnership and collaboration with member churches, mission agencies, and theological schools. These partnerships will enable us to move beyond theoretical formulation to grounding the work in the life and reality of our member churches. This is an essential aspect of co-creating in partnership with God in God's yearning to mend and heal the world. This is one of the reasons that a part of the way we will engage our work together is in *regional groups*. It is our hope that the regional groups will not only allow you (the members of the Commission) to work in more "normal" time-zones, but will provide you the opportunity to root the work in local context.

Working in partnership means that we will not need to do everything or initiate everything on our agenda, but we can connect, convene, and curate. One example is the work on reparation. A number of member churches and mission organizations are working on this theme. We have been able to convene some of these folks and connect them to each other. We will seek to further develop this model as a way of working.

The program committee of the Assembly and the central committee has indicated the CWME and Faith and Order need to work together. The previous Commission began to imagine way of working collaboratively with Faith and Order, with the moderators of each Commission attending and participating in each other's commission meetings. Peter Cruchley and I were invited to participate in Faith and Order Commission meeting in Indonesia and Andrej Jeftic, the director of Faith and Order will be participating in our meeting in Kenya. The commitment is to continue to deepen the relationship. In 2025, Faith and Order will be hosting its conference on the theme of Nicaea; we will be contributing to that conference as one part of the collaboration. We might also offer some reflections of the document, **Common Threads**: Key Themes from Responses to ***The Church: Towards a Common Vision***

Programmatically, in addition to *Faith and Order*, we will be engaging with most of the Commissions and program areas within the Secretariat. This will primarily, be the work of staff. It is essential to keep an intersectional approach to the work and particularly, that both the work on decolonization and mission from the margins frame the imagination of all the work of the WCC and not just be seen as the work of CWME. Transversal (T6) on *Overcoming Racism, Xenophobia and other forms of discrimination* will be a critical partner for the CWME during this season of its work.

The integration of the Ecumenical Indigenous Peoples Network (EIPN) and the Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network (EDAN) is critical to the transformation of the Commission and the need to be rooted in praxis. Members of these networks are full members of the Commission and we anticipate their contribution to the work of the Commission.

We have begun an exploration with the Vatican and the World Evangelical Fellowship about the possibility of a joint mission programme. This will be another opportunity for partnership and collaboration.

Pilgrimage

The Assembly chose to continue the theme of the ecumenical pilgrimage, the theme of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity. The Assembly saw the pilgrimage as an opportunity to journey together and as a journey of transformation, among other things. The Pilgrimage is seen as "an invitation, a direction, and a methodology." The central committee has invited all the moderators of the various Commissions to

form the Pilgrimage Reference Group; this is a key strategic move as it enables the possibility of an intersectional approach to the living into the themes of the Pilgrimage. CWME has much to contribute. We have already flagged the challenge to the language of Pilgrimage especially as raised by Indigenous peoples.

One of the key building blocks as identified in the discussion paper sent to the November 2023 meeting of the executive committee, meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, was the intersection of theology and missiology.

*“The Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity is rooted in the love of the Triune God, who created the world, empowers and renews it through the Holy Spirit, and aims to reconcile all things in Christ. This pilgrimage is not directed towards a specific holy place but towards the fulfilment of God’s reign in this world. It is a movement of God’s Spirit in God’s people to transform God’s world that has been tainted by sin, suffering and the evil one. The Pilgrimage should be firmly grounded **theologically and missiologically** taking cognisance of its Christological and pneumatological biblical foundations.”*

Together Towards Life, The Arusha Call to Transforming Discipleship and the focus work on decolonization and on “Preparing the Way” will all be significant frameworks for helping to ground the Pilgrimage missiological.

Personnel

It been a delight for me to work with Dr Cruchley as the director of CWME. I am grateful to the staff team - Kiki, Angeline, and Lori for their faithful and prophetic ministry. We look forward to supporting and collaborating in the days ahead.