

## **TOGETHER TOWARDS LIFE: MISSION AND EVANGELISM IN CHANGING LANDSCAPES**

### **A New WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism**

*The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) has, since the WCC Porto Alegre Assembly in 2006, been working and contributing toward the construction of a new ecumenical mission affirmation. The new statement will be presented to the WCC 10th assembly at Busan, Korea, in 2013. Since the integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in New Delhi, 1961, there has been only one official WCC position statement on mission and evangelism which was approved by the central committee in 1982, "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation." This new mission affirmation has been unanimously approved by the WCC central committee held in Crete, Greece on 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2012. It is the aim of this ecumenical discernment to seek vision, concepts and directions for a renewed understanding and practice of mission and evangelism in changing landscapes. It seeks a broad appeal, even wider than WCC member churches and affiliated mission bodies, so that we can commit ourselves together to fullness of life for all, led by the God of Life!*

### **TOGETHER TOWARDS LIFE: INTRODUCING THE THEME**

1. We believe in the Triune God who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all life. God created the whole *oikoumene* in God's image and constantly works in the world to affirm and safeguard life. We believe in Jesus Christ, the Life of the world, the incarnation of God's love for the world (John 3:16).<sup>1</sup> Affirming life in all its fullness is Jesus Christ's ultimate concern and mission (John 10:10). We believe in God, the Holy Spirit, the Life-giver, who sustains and empowers life and renews the whole creation (Genesis 2:7; John 3:8). A denial of life is a rejection of the God of life. God invites us into the life-giving mission of the Triune God and empowers us to bear witness to the vision of abundant life for all in the new heaven and earth. How and where do we discern God's life-giving work that enables us to participate in God's mission today?
2. Mission begins in the heart of the Triune God and the love which binds together the Holy Trinity overflows to all humanity and creation. The missionary God who sent the Son to the world calls all God's people (John 20:21), and empowers them to be a community of hope. The church is commissioned to celebrate life, and to resist and transform all life-destroying forces, in the power of the Holy Spirit. How important it is to "receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22) to become living witnesses to the coming reign of God! From a renewed appreciation of the mission of the Spirit, how do we re-envision God's mission in a changing and diverse world today?
3. Life in the Holy Spirit is the essence of mission, the core of why we do what we do, and how we live our lives. Spirituality gives deepest meaning to our lives and motivates our actions. It is a sacred gift from the Creator, the energy for affirming and caring for life. This mission spirituality has a dynamic of transformation which, through spiritual commitment of people, is capable of transforming the world in God's grace. How can we reclaim mission as transformative spirituality which is life-affirming?
4. God did not send the Son for the salvation of humanity alone or give us a partial salvation. Rather the gospel is the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and society. It is, therefore, vital to recognize God's mission in a cosmic sense, and to affirm all life, the whole

*oikoumene*, as being interconnected in God's web of life. As threats to the future of our planet are evident, what are their implications for our participation in God's mission?

5. The history of Christian mission has been characterized by conceptions of geographical expansion from a Christian centre to the "un-reached territories", to the ends of the earth. But today we are facing a radically changing ecclesial landscape described as "world Christianity" where the majority of Christians are either living, or have their origins in the global South and East.<sup>2</sup> Migration has become a worldwide, multi-directional phenomenon which is re-shaping the Christian landscape. The emergence of strong Pentecostal and charismatic movements from different localities is one of the most noteworthy characteristics of world Christianity today. What are the insights for mission and evangelism – theologies, agendas and practices – of this "shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity"?
6. Mission has been understood as a movement taking place from the centre to the periphery, and from the privileged to the marginalized of society. Now people at the margins are claiming their key role as agents of mission and affirming mission as transformation. This reversal of roles in terms of envisioning mission has strong biblical foundations because God chose the poor, the foolish and the powerless (1 Corinthians 1:18-31) to further God's mission of justice and peace so that life may flourish. If there is a shift of the mission concept from "mission to the margins" to "mission from the margins", what then is the distinctive contribution of the people from the margins? And why are their experiences and visions crucial for re-imagining mission and evangelism today?
7. We are living in a world in which faith in mammon threatens the credibility of the gospel. Market ideology is spreading the propaganda that the global market will save the world through unlimited growth. This myth is a threat not only to economic life but also to the spiritual life of people, and not only to humanity but also to the whole creation. How can we proclaim the good news and values of God's kingdom in the global market, or win over the spirit of the market? What kind of missional action can the church take in the midst of economic and ecological injustice and crisis on a global scale?
8. All Christians, churches and congregations are called to be vibrant messengers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the good news of salvation. Evangelism is a confident but humble sharing of our faith and conviction with other people. Such sharing is a gift to others which announces the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ. It is the inevitable fruit of genuine faith. Therefore, in each generation, the church must renew its commitment to evangelism as an essential part of the way we convey God's love to the world. How can we proclaim God's love and justice to a generation living in an individualized, secularized and materialized world?
9. The church lives in multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts and new communication technology is also bringing the people of the world into a greater awareness of one another's identities and pursuits. Locally and globally Christians are engaged with people of other religions and cultures in building societies of love, peace and justice. Plurality is a challenge to the churches and serious commitment to inter-faith dialogue and cross-cultural communication is therefore indispensable. What are the ecumenical convictions regarding common witnessing and practising life-giving mission in a world of many religions and cultures?
10. The church is a gift of God to the world for its transformation towards the kingdom of God. Its mission is to bring new life and announce the loving presence of God in our world. We must participate in God's mission in unity, overcoming the divisions and tensions that exist among us, so that the world may believe and all may be one (John 17:21). The church, as the communion of Christ's disciples, must become an inclusive community and exists to bring healing and reconciliation to the world. How can the church renew herself to be missional and move forward together towards life in its fullness?
11. This statement highlights some key developments in understanding the mission of the Holy Spirit within the mission of the Triune God (*missio Dei*) which have emerged through the work of CWME. It does so under four main headings:

- Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life
- Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins
- Spirit of Community: Church on the Move
- Spirit of Pentecost: Good News for All

Reflection on such perspectives enables us to embrace dynamism, justice, diversity and transformation as key concepts of mission in changing landscapes today. In response to the questions posed above, we conclude with ten affirmations for mission and evangelism today.

## SPIRIT OF MISSION: BREATH OF LIFE

### The Mission of the Spirit

12. God's Spirit – *ru'ach* – moved over the waters at the beginning (Genesis 1:2), being the source of life and the breath of humankind (Genesis 2:7). In the Hebrew Bible, the Spirit led the people of God – inspiring wisdom (Proverbs 8), empowering prophecy (Isaiah 61:1), stirring life from dry bones (Ezekiel 37), prompting dreams (Joel 2) and bringing renewal as the glory of the Lord in the temple (2 Chronicles 7:1).
13. The same Spirit of God, which “swept over the face of the waters” in creation, descended on Mary (Luke 1:35) and brought forth Jesus. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:10) and commissioned him for his mission (Luke 4:14, 18). Jesus Christ, full of the Spirit of God, died on the cross. He gave up the spirit (John 19:30). In death, in the coldness of the tomb, by the power of the Holy Spirit he was raised to life, the firstborn from the dead (Romans 8:11).
14. After his resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to his community and sent his disciples in mission: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21-22). By the gift of the Holy Spirit, “the power from on high”, they were formed into a new community of witness to the hope in Christ (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). In the Spirit of unity, the early church lived together and shared her goods among her members (Acts 2:44-45).
15. The universality of the Spirit's economy in creation and the particularity of the Spirit's work in redemption have to be understood together as the mission of the Spirit for the new heaven and earth, when God finally will be “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The Holy Spirit works in the world often in mysterious and unknown ways beyond our imagination (Luke 1:34-35; John 3:8; Acts 2:16-21).
16. Biblical witness attests to a variety of understandings of the role of the Holy Spirit in mission. One perspective of the role of the Holy Spirit in mission emphasizes the Holy Spirit as fully dependent on Christ, the Paraclete and the one who will come as Counsellor and Advocate only after Christ has gone to the Father. The Holy Spirit is seen as the continuing presence of Christ, his agent to fulfil the task of mission. This understanding leads to a missiology focusing on sending out and going forth. Therefore, a pneumatological focus on Christian mission recognises that mission is essentially christologically based and relates the work of the Holy Spirit to the salvation through Jesus Christ.
17. Another perspective emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of Truth” that leads us to the “whole truth” (John 16:13) and blows wherever he/she wills (John 3:8), thus embracing the whole of the cosmos, therefore proclaiming the Holy Spirit as the source of Christ, and the church as the eschatological coming together (*synaxis*) of the people of God in God's kingdom. The second perspective posits that the faithful go forth in peace (in mission) after they have experienced in their eucharistic gathering the eschatological kingdom of God as a glimpse and foretaste of it. Mission as going forth is thus the outcome, rather than the origin of the church, and is called “liturgy after the liturgy”.<sup>3</sup>

18. What is clear is that by the Spirit we participate in the mission of love that is at the heart of the life of the Trinity. This results in Christian witness which unceasingly proclaims the salvific power of God through Jesus Christ and constantly affirms God's dynamic involvement, through the Holy Spirit, in the whole created world. All who respond to the outpouring of the love of God are invited to join in with the Spirit in the mission of God.

### **Mission and the Flourishing of Creation**

19. Mission is the overflow of the infinite love of the Triune God. God's mission begins with the act of creation. Creation's life and God's life are entwined. The mission of God's Spirit encompasses us all in an ever-giving act of grace. We are therefore called to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all created life. We hear the cry of the earth as we listen to the cries of the poor and we know that from its beginning the earth has cried out to God over humanity's injustice (Genesis 4:10).

20. Mission with creation at its heart is already a positive movement in our churches through campaigns for eco-justice and more sustainable lifestyles and the development of spiritualities that are respectful of the earth. However, we have sometimes forgotten that the whole of creation is included in the reconciled unity towards which we are all called (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). We do not believe that the earth is to be discarded and only souls saved; both the earth and our bodies have to be transformed through the Spirit's grace. As the vision of Isaiah and John's revelation testify, heaven and earth will be made new (Isaiah 11:1-9; 25:6-10; 66:22; Revelation 21:1-4).

21. Our participation in mission, our being in creation and our practice of the life of the Spirit need to be woven together for they are mutually transformative. We ought not to seek the one without the others. If we do, we will lapse into an individualistic spirituality that leads us to falsely believe we can belong to God without belonging to our neighbour and we will fall into a spirituality that simply makes us feel good while other parts of creation hurt and yearn.

22. We need a new conversion (*metanoia*) in our mission, which invites a new humility in regard to the mission of God's Spirit. We tend to understand and practise mission as something done by humanity to others. Instead, humans can participate in communion *with* all of creation in celebrating the work of the Creator. In many ways creation is in mission to humanity, for instance the natural world has a power that can heal the human heart and body. The wisdom literature affirms creation's praise of its Creator (Psalm 19:1-4; 66:1; 96:11-13; 98:4; 100:1; 150:6). The Creator's joy and wonder in creation is one of the sources of our spirituality (Job 38-39).

23. We want to affirm our spiritual connection with creation, yet the reality is the earth is being polluted and exploited. Consumerism triggers not limitless growth but rather endless exploitation of the earth's resources. Human greed is contributing to global warming and other forms of climate change. If this trend continues and earth is fatally damaged, what can we imagine salvation to be? Humanity cannot be saved alone while the rest of the created world perishes. Eco-justice cannot be separated from salvation, and salvation cannot come without a new humility that respects the needs of all life on earth.

### **Spiritual Gifts and Discernment**

24. The Holy Spirit gives gifts freely and impartially (1 Corinthians 12:8-10; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11) which are to be shared for the building up of others (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:26) and the reconciliation of the whole creation (Romans 8:19-23). One of the gifts of the Spirit is discernment of spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10). We discern the Spirit of God wherever life in its fullness is affirmed and in all its dimensions, including liberation of the oppressed, healing and reconciliation of broken communities and the restoration of the creation. We also discern evil spirits wherever forces of death and destruction of life prevail.

25. The early Christians, like many today, experienced a world of many spirits. The New Testament witnesses to diverse spirits, including evil spirits, "ministering spirits" (i.e. angels, Hebrews 1:14), "principalities" and "powers" (Ephesians 6:12), the beast (Revelation 13:1-7) and other powers – both good and evil. The apostle Paul also testifies to some spiritual struggle (Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Corinthians 10:4-6) and the injunction to resist the devil (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8). The churches are called to discern the work of the life-giving Spirit sent into the world and to join with the Holy Spirit in bringing about God's reign of justice (Acts 1:6-8). When we have discerned the Holy Spirit's presence, we are called to respond, recognizing that God's Spirit is often subversive, leading us beyond boundaries and surprising us.
26. Our encounter with the Triune God is inward, personal, and communal but also directs us outward in missionary endeavour. The traditional symbols and titles for the Spirit (such as fire, light, dew, fountain, anointing, healing, melting, warming, solace, comfort, strength, rest, washing, shining) show that the Spirit is familiar with our lives and connected with all the aspects of relationship, life and creation with which mission is concerned. We are led by the Spirit into various situations and moments, into meeting points with others, into spaces of encounter and into critical locations of human struggle.
27. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom (Isaiah 11:3; Ephesians 1:17) and guides into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit inspires human cultures and creativity, so it is part of our mission to acknowledge, respect and cooperate with life-giving wisdoms in every culture and context. We regret that mission activity linked with colonization has often denigrated cultures and failed to recognize the wisdom of local people. Local wisdom and culture which is life-affirming is a gift from God's Spirit. We lift up testimonies of peoples whose traditions have been scorned and mocked by theologians and scientists, yet their wisdom offers us the vital and sometimes new orientation that can connect us again with the life of the Spirit in creation, which helps us to consider the ways in which God is revealed in creation.
28. The claim that the Spirit is with us is not for us to make, but for others to recognize in the life that we lead. The apostle Paul expresses this by encouraging the church to bear the fruits of the Spirit which entail love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, self-control (Galatians 5:23). As we bear these fruits, we hope others will discern the love and power of the Spirit at work.

### **Transformative Spirituality**

29. Authentic Christian witness is not only in *what* we do in mission but *how* we live out our mission. The church in mission can only be sustained by spiritualities deeply rooted in the Trinity's communion of love. Spirituality gives our lives their deepest meaning. It stimulates, motivates and gives dynamism to life's journey. It is energy for life in its fullness and calls for a commitment to resist all forces, powers and systems which deny, destroy and reduce life.
30. Mission spirituality is always transformative. Mission spirituality resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics, and even our churches. "Our faithfulness to God and God's free gift of life compels us to confront idolatrous assumptions, unjust systems, politics of domination and exploitation in our current world economic order. Economics and economic justice are always matters of faith as they touch the very core of God's will for creation".<sup>4</sup> Mission spirituality motivates us to serve God's economy of life, not mammon, to share life at God's table rather than satisfy individual greed, to pursue change to a better world while challenging the self-interest of the powerful who desire to maintain the status quo.
31. Jesus has told us, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24, KJV). The policy of unlimited growth through the domination of the global free market is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and from nature. "It makes the false promise that it can save the world through creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance which amounts to idolatry".<sup>5</sup> This is a global system of mammon

that protects the unlimited growth of wealth of only the rich and powerful through endless exploitation. This tower of greed is threatening the whole household of God. The reign of God is in direct opposition to the empire of mammon.

32. Transformation can be understood in the light of the Paschal mystery: "If we have died with Christ, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:11-12). In situations of oppression, discrimination and hurt, the cross of Christ is the power of God for salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18). Even in our time, some have paid with their lives for their Christian witness, reminding us all of the cost of discipleship. The Spirit gives Christians courage to live out their convictions, even in the face of persecution and martyrdom.
33. The cross calls for repentance in light of misuse of power and use of the wrong kind of power in mission and in the church. "Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures."<sup>6</sup> The Spirit empowers the powerless and challenges the powerful to empty themselves of their privileges for the sake of the disempowered.
34. Experiencing life in the Spirit is to taste life in its fullness. We are called to witness to a movement towards life, celebrating all that the Spirit continues to call into being, walking in solidarity in order to cross the rivers of despair and anxiety (Psalm 23, Isaiah 43:1-5). Mission provokes in us a renewed awareness that the Holy Spirit meets us and challenges us at all levels of life, and brings newness and change to the places and times of our personal and collective journeys.
35. The Holy Spirit is present with us as companion, yet never domesticated or "tame". Among the surprises of the Spirit are the ways in which God works from locations which appear to be on the margins and through people who appear to be excluded.

## **SPIRIT OF LIBERATION: MISSION FROM THE MARGINS**

36. God's purpose for the world is not to create another world, but to re-create what God has already created in love and wisdom. Jesus began his ministry by claiming that to be filled by the Spirit is to liberate the oppressed, to open eyes that are blind, and to announce the coming of God's reign (Luke 4:16-18). He went about fulfilling this mission by opting to be with the marginalized people of his time, not out of paternalistic charity but because their situations testified to the sinfulness of the world, and their yearnings for life pointed to God's purposes.
37. Jesus Christ relates to and embraces those who are most marginalized in society, in order to confront and transform all that denies life. This includes cultures and systems which generate and sustain massive poverty, discrimination and dehumanization, and that exploit or destroy people and the earth. Mission from the margins calls for an understanding of the complexities of power dynamics, global systems and structures, and local contextual realities. Christian mission has at times been understood and practised in ways which failed to recognize God's alignment with those consistently pushed to the margins. Therefore, mission from the margins invites the church to re-imagine mission as a vocation from God's Spirit who works for a world where the fullness of life is available for all.

### **Why Margins and Marginalization?**

38. Mission from the margins seeks to counteract injustices in life, church, and mission. It seeks to be an alternative missional movement against the perception that mission can only be done by the powerful to the powerless, by the rich to the poor, or by the privileged to the marginalized. Such approaches can contribute to oppression and marginalization. Mission from the margins recognizes that being in the centre means having access to systems that lead to one's rights, freedom and individuality being affirmed and respected; living in the margins means exclusion from justice and dignity. Living on the margins, however, can provide its own lessons. People on the margins have agency, and can often see

what, from the centre, is out of view. People on the margins, living in vulnerable positions, often know what exclusionary forces are threatening their survival and can best discern the urgency of their struggles; people in positions of privilege have much to learn from the daily struggles of people living in marginal conditions.

39. Marginalized people have God-given gifts that are under-utilized because of disempowerment, and denial of access to opportunities and/or justice. Through struggles in and for life, marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.
40. Because the context of missional activity influences its scope and character, the social location of all engaged in mission work must be taken into account. Missiological reflections need to recognize the different value orientations that shape missional perspectives. The aim of mission is not simply to move people from the margins to centres of power but to confront those who remain the centre by keeping people on the margins. Instead, churches are called to *transform* power structures.
41. The dominant expressions of mission, in the past and today, have often been directed *at* people on the margins of societies. These have generally viewed those on the margins as recipients and not active agents of missionary activity. Mission expressed in this way has too often been complicit with oppressive and life-denying systems. It has generally aligned with the privileges of the centre and largely failed to challenge economic, social, cultural and political systems which have marginalized some peoples. Mission from the centre is motivated by an attitude of paternalism and a superiority complex. Historically, this has equated Christianity with Western culture and resulted in adverse consequences, including the denial of the full personhood of the victims of such marginalization.
42. A major common concern of people from the margins is the failure of societies, cultures, civilizations, nations and even churches to honour the dignity and worth of *all* persons. Injustice is at the roots of the inequalities that give rise to marginalization and oppression. God's desire for justice is inextricably linked to God's nature and sovereignty: "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords....who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who also loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:17-18). All missional activity must, therefore, safeguard the sacred worth of every human being and of the earth (cf. Isaiah 58).

### **Mission as Struggle and Resistance**

43. The affirmation of God's mission (*missio Dei*) points to the belief in God as One who acts in history and in creation, in concrete realities of time and contexts, who seeks the fullness of life for the whole earth, through justice, peace and reconciliation. Participation in God's ongoing work of liberation and reconciliation by the Holy Spirit, therefore, includes discerning and unmasking the demons that exploit and enslave. For example, this involves deconstructing patriarchal ideologies, upholding the right to self-determination for Indigenous peoples, and challenging the social embeddedness of racism and casteism.
44. The church's hope is rooted in the promised fulfilment of the reign of God. It entails the restoration of right relationships between God and humanity and all of creation. Even though this vision speaks to an eschatological reality, it deeply energizes and informs our current participation in God's salvific work in this penultimate period.
45. Participation in God's mission follows the way of Jesus, who came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45); who tears down the mighty and powerful and exalts the lowly (Luke 1:46-55); and whose love is characterized by mutuality, reciprocity and interdependence. It, therefore, requires a commitment to struggle and resist the powers that obstruct the fullness of life that God wills for all, and a willingness to work with all people involved in movements and initiatives committed to the causes of justice, dignity and life.

## **Mission Seeking Justice and Inclusivity**

46. The good news of God's reign is about the promise of the actualization of a just and inclusive world. Inclusivity fosters just relationships in the community of humanity and creation, with mutual acknowledgement of persons and creation, and mutual respect and sustenance of each one's sacred worth. It also facilitates each one's full participation in the life of the community. Baptism in Christ implies a lifelong commitment to give an account of this hope by overcoming the barriers in order to find a common identity under the sovereignty of God (Galatians 3:27-28). Therefore, discrimination of all types against any human being is unacceptable in the sight of God.
47. Jesus promises that the last shall be first (Matthew 20:16). To the extent that the church practises radical hospitality to the estranged in society, it demonstrates commitment to embodying the values of the reign of God (Isaiah 58:6). To the extent that it denounces self-centredness as a way of life, it makes space for the reign of God to permeate human existence. To the extent that it renounces violence in its physical, psychological and spiritual manifestations both in personal interactions and in the economic, political, social systems, it testifies to the reign of God at work in the world.
48. In reality, however, mission, money and political power are strategic partners. Although our theological and missiological talk says a lot about the mission of the church being in solidarity with the poor, sometimes in practice it is much more concerned with being in the centres of power, eating with the rich and lobbying for money to maintain ecclesial bureaucracy. This poses particular challenges to reflect on what is the good news for people who are privileged and powerful.
49. The church is called to make present God's holy and life-affirming plan for the world revealed in Jesus Christ. It means rejecting values and practices which lead to the destruction of community. Christians are called to acknowledge the sinful nature of all forms of discrimination and transform unjust structures. This call places certain expectations on the church. It must refuse to harbour oppressive forces within its ranks, acting instead as a counter-cultural community. The biblical mandate to the covenant community in both testaments is characterized by the dictum, "It shall not be so among you" (Matthew 20:26, KJV).

## **Mission as Healing and Wholeness**

50. Actions towards healing and wholeness of life of persons and communities are an important expression of mission. Healing was not only a central feature of Jesus' ministry but also a feature of his call to his followers to continue his work (Matthew 10:1). Healing is also one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9; Acts 3). The Spirit empowers the church for a life-nurturing mission, which includes prayer, pastoral care, and professional health care on the one hand, and prophetic denunciation of the root causes of suffering, transforming structures that dispense injustice and the pursuit of scientific research on the other.
51. Health is more than physical and/or mental well-being, and healing is not primarily medical. This understanding of health coheres with the biblical-theological tradition of the church, which sees a human being as a multidimensional unity, and the body, soul and mind as interrelated and interdependent. It thus affirms the social, political and ecological dimensions of personhood and wholeness. Health, in the sense of wholeness, is a condition related to God's promise for the end of time, as well as a real possibility in the present.<sup>7</sup> Wholeness is not a static balance of harmony but rather involves living-in-community with God, people and creation. Individualism and injustice are barriers to community building, and therefore to wholeness. Discrimination on grounds of medical conditions or disability – including HIV and AIDS – is contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ. When all the parts of our individual and corporate lives that have been left out are included, and wherever the neglected or marginalized are brought together in love, such that wholeness is experienced, we may discern signs of God's reign on earth.



52. Societies have tended to see disability or illness as a manifestation of sin or a medical problem to be solved. The medical model has emphasized the correction or cure of what is assumed to be the "deficiency" in the individual. Many who are marginalized, however, do not see themselves as "deficient" or "sick". The Bible recounts many instances where Jesus healed people with various infirmities but, equally importantly, he restored people to their rightful places within the fabric of the community. Healing is more about the restoration of wholeness than about correcting something perceived as defective. To become whole, the parts that have become estranged need to be reclaimed. The fixation on cure is thus a perspective that must be overcome in order to promote the biblical focus. Mission should foster the full participation of people with disabilities and illness in the life of the church and society.
53. Christian medical mission aims at achieving health for all, in the sense that all people around the globe will have access to quality health care. There are many ways in which churches can be, and are, involved in health and healing in a comprehensive sense. They create or support clinics and mission hospitals; they offer counselling services, care groups and health programmes; local churches can create groups to visit sick congregation members. Healing processes could include praying with and for the sick, confession and forgiveness, the laying-on of hands, anointing with oil, and the use of charismatic spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12). But it must also be noted that inappropriate forms of Christian worship, including triumphalistic healing services in which the healer is glorified at the expense of God, and where false expectations are raised, can deeply harm people. This is not to deny God's miraculous intervention of healing in some cases.
54. As a community of imperfect people, and as part of a creation groaning in pain and longing for its liberation, the Christian community can be a sign of hope, and an expression of the kingdom of God here on earth (Romans 8:22-24). The Holy Spirit works for justice and healing in many ways and is pleased to indwell the particular community which is called to embody Christ's mission.

## **SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY: CHURCH ON THE MOVE**

### **God's Mission and the Life of the Church**

55. The life of the church arises from the love of the Triune God. "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Mission is a response to God's urging love shown in creation and redemption. "God's love invites us" (*Caritas Christi urget nos*). This communion (*koinonia*) opens our hearts and lives to our brothers and sisters in the same movement of sharing God's love (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Living in that love of God, the church is called to become good news for all. The Triune God's overflowing sharing of love is the source of all mission and evangelism.
56. God's love, manifest in the Holy Spirit, is an inspirational gift to all humanity "in all times and places"<sup>8</sup> and for all cultures and situations. The powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, revealed in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, initiates us into the fullness of life that is God's gift to each one of us. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God indwells the church, revealing God's purposes for the world, and empowering and enabling its members to participate in the realization of those purposes.
57. The church in history has not always existed but, both theologically and empirically, came into being for the sake of mission. It is not possible to separate church and mission in terms of their origin or purpose. To fulfil God's missionary purpose is the church's aim. The relationship between church and mission is very intimate because the same Spirit of Christ who empowers the church in mission is also the life of the church. At the same time as he sent the church into the world, Jesus Christ breathed the Holy Spirit into the church (John 20:19-23). Therefore, the church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. If it does not engage in mission, it ceases to be church.

58. Starting with God's mission leads to an ecclesiological approach "from below". In this perspective it is not the church that has a mission but rather the mission that has a church. Mission is not a project of expanding churches but of the church embodying God's salvation in this world. Out of this follows a dynamic understanding of the apostolicity of the church: apostolicity is not only safeguarding the faith of the church through the ages but also participating in the apostolate. Thus the churches mainly and foremost need to be missionary churches.

### God's Mission and the Church's Unity

59. Living out our faith in community is an important way of participating in mission. Through baptism, we become sisters and brothers belonging together in Christ (Hebrews 10:25). The church is called to be an inclusive community that welcomes all. Through word and deed and in its very being, the church foretastes and witnesses to the vision of the coming reign of God. The church is the *coming together* of the faithful and their *going forth* in peace.
60. Practically, as well as theologically, mission and unity belong together. In this regard, the integration in 1961 of IMC and WCC was a significant step. This historical experience encourages us to believe that mission and church can come together. This aim, however, is not yet fully accomplished. We have to continue this journey in our century with fresh attempts so that the church becomes truly missionary.
61. The churches realize today that in many respects they are still not adequate embodiments of God's mission. Sometimes, a sense of separation of mission and church still prevails. The lack of full and real unity in mission still harms the authenticity and credibility of the fulfilment of God's mission in this world. Our Lord prayed "that they may all be one...so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). Thus mission and unity are intertwined. Consequently there is the need to open up our reflections on church and unity to an even wider understanding of unity: the unity of humanity and even the cosmic unity of the whole of God's creation.
62. The highly competitive environment of the free market economy has unfortunately influenced some churches and para-church movements to seek to be "winners" over others. This can even lead to the adoption of aggressive tactics to persuade Christians who already belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance. Seeking numerical growth at all costs is incompatible with the respect for others required of Christian disciples. Jesus became our Christ not through power or money but through his self-emptying (*kenosis*) and death on the cross. This humble understanding of mission does not merely shape our methods, but is the very nature and essence of our faith in Christ. The church is a servant in God's mission and not the master. The missionary church glorifies God in self-emptying love.
63. The Christian communities in their diversity are called to identify and practise ways of common witness in a spirit of partnership and cooperation, including through mutually respectful and responsible forms of evangelism. Common witness is what the "churches, even while separated, bear together, especially through joint efforts, by manifesting whatever divine gifts of truth and life they already share and experience in common."<sup>9</sup>
64. The missionary nature of the church also means that there must be a way that churches and para-church structures can be more closely related. The integration of IMC and WCC brought about a new framework for consideration of church unity and mission. While discussions of unity have been very concerned with structural questions, mission agencies can represent flexibility and subsidiarity in mission. While para-church movements can find accountability and direction through ecclesial mooring, para-church structures can help churches not to forget their dynamic apostolic character.
65. The CWME, the direct heir of Edinburgh 1910's initiatives on cooperation and unity, provides a structure for churches and mission agencies to seek ways of expressing and strengthening unity in mission. Being an integral part of the WCC, the CWME has been able to encounter new understandings of mission and unity from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and

Indigenous churches from all over the globe. In particular, the context of the WCC has facilitated close working relationships with the Roman Catholic Church. A growing intensity of collaboration with Evangelicals, especially with the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Alliance, has also abundantly contributed to the enrichment of ecumenical theological reflection on mission in unity. Together we share a common concern that the whole church should witness to the whole gospel in the whole world.<sup>10</sup>

66. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of unity, unites people and churches too, to celebrate unity in diversity both proactively and constructively. The Spirit provides both the dynamic context and the resources needed for people to explore differences in a safe, positive and nurturing environment in order to grow into an inclusive and mutually responsible community.

### **God Empowers the Church in Mission**

67. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit, God indwells the church, empowering and energizing its members. Thus mission becomes for Christians an urgent inner compulsion (1 Corinthians 9:16), even a test and criterion for authentic life in Christ, rooted in the profound demands of Christ's love, to invite others to share in the fullness of life Jesus came to bring. Participating in God's mission, therefore, should be natural for all Christians and all churches, not only for particular individuals or specialized groups.<sup>11</sup>

68. What makes the Christian message of God's abundant love for humanity and all creation credible is our ability to speak with one voice, where possible, and to give common witness and an account of the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). The churches have therefore produced a rich array of common declarations, some of them resulting in uniting or united churches, and of dialogues, seeking to restore the unity of all Christians in one living organism of healing and reconciliation. A rediscovery of the work of the Holy Spirit in healing and reconciliation, which is at the heart of today's mission theology, has significant ecumenical implications.<sup>12</sup>

69. While acknowledging the great importance of "visible" unity among churches, nonetheless unity need not be sought only at the level of organizational structures. From a mission perspective, it is important to discern what helps the cause of God's mission. In other words, unity in mission is the basis for the visible unity of the churches which also has implications for the order of the church. Attempts to achieve unity must be in concert with the biblical call to seek justice. Our call to do justice may sometimes involve breaking false unities that silence and oppress. Genuine unity always entails inclusivity and respect for others.

70. Today's context of large-scale worldwide migration challenges the churches' commitment to unity in very practical ways. We are told: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2, NIV). Churches can be a place of refuge for migrant communities; they can also be intentional focal points for inter-cultural engagement.<sup>13</sup> The churches are called to be one to serve God's mission beyond ethnic and cultural boundaries and ought to create multi-cultural ministry and mission as a concrete expression of common witness in diversity. This may entail advocating justice in regard to migration policies and resistance to xenophobia and racism. Women, children, and undocumented workers are often the most vulnerable among migrants in all contexts. But, women are also often at the cutting edge of new migrant ministries.

71. God's hospitality calls us to move beyond binary notions of culturally dominant groups as hosts, and migrant and minority peoples as guests. Instead, in God's hospitality, God is host and we are all invited by the Spirit to participate with humility and mutuality in God's mission.

### **Local Congregations: New Initiatives**

72. While cherishing the unity of the Spirit in the one Church, it is also important to honour the ways in which each local congregation is led by the Spirit to respond to their own contextual realities. Today's

changed world calls for local congregations to take new initiatives. For example, in the secularizing global north, new forms of contextual mission, such as “new monasticism”, “emerging church”, and “fresh expressions”, have re-defined and re-vitalized churches. Exploring contextual ways of being church can be particularly relevant to young people. Some churches in the global north now meet in pubs, coffee houses, or converted movie theatres. Engaging with church life online is an attractive option for young people thinking in a non-linear, visual, and experiential way.

73. Like the early church in the Book of Acts, local congregations have the privilege of forming a community marked by the presence of the risen Christ. For many people, acceptance or refusal to become members of the church is linked to their positive or negative experience with a local congregation, which can be either a stumbling block or an agent of transformation.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is vital that local congregations are constantly renewed and inspired by the Spirit of mission. Local congregations are frontiers and primary agents of mission.
74. Worship and the Sacraments play a crucial role in the formation of transformative spirituality and mission. Reading the Bible contextually is also a primary resource in enabling local congregations to be messengers and witnesses to God’s justice and love. Liturgy in the sanctuary only has full integrity when we live out God’s mission in our communities in our daily life. Local congregations are therefore impelled to step out of their comfort zones and cross boundaries for the sake of the mission of God.
75. More than ever before, local congregations today can play a key role in emphasizing the crossing of cultural and racial boundaries, and affirming cultural difference as a gift of the Spirit. Rather than being perceived as a problem, migration can be seen as offering new possibilities for churches to re-discover themselves afresh. It inspires opportunities for the creation of intercultural and multicultural churches at local level. All churches can create space for different cultural communities to come together; and embrace exciting opportunities for contextual expressions of intercultural mission in our time.
76. Local congregations can also, as never before, develop global connections. Many inspirational and transformative linkages are being formed between churches that are geographically far apart and located in very different contexts. These offer innovative possibilities but are not without pitfalls. The increasingly popular short-term “mission trips” can help to build partnerships between churches in different parts of the world but in some cases place an intolerable burden on poor local churches, or disregard the existing churches altogether. While there is some danger and caution around such trips, these exposure opportunities in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts can also lead to long-term change when the traveller returns to their home community. The challenge is to find ways of exercising spiritual gifts which build up the whole church in every part (1 Corinthians 12-14).
77. Advocacy for justice is no longer the sole prerogative of national assemblies and central offices but a form of witness which calls for the engagement of local churches. For example, the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2011) concluded with a plea in the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation that: “Churches must help in identifying the everyday choices that can abuse and promote human rights, gender justice, climate justice, unity and peace”.<sup>15</sup> Their grounding in everyday life gives local churches both legitimacy and motivation in the struggle for justice and peace.
78. The church in every geo-political and socio-economic context is called to service (*diakonia*) – to live out the faith and hope of the community of God’s people, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ. Through service the church participates in God’s mission, following the way of its Servant Lord. The church is called to be a diaconal community manifesting the power of service over the power of domination, enabling and nurturing possibilities for life, and witnessing to God’s transforming grace through acts of service that hold forth the promise of God’s reign.<sup>16</sup>
79. As the church discovers more deeply its identity as a missionary community, its outward-looking character finds expression in evangelism.

## SPIRIT OF PENTECOST: GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

### The Call to Evangelize

80. Witness (*martyria*) takes concrete form in evangelism – the communication of the whole gospel to the whole of humanity in the whole world.<sup>17</sup> Its goal is the salvation of the world and the glory of the Triune God. Evangelism is mission activity which makes explicit and unambiguous the centrality of the incarnation, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ without setting limits to the saving grace of God. It seeks to share this good news with all who have not yet heard it and invites them to an experience of life in Christ.
81. “Evangelism is the outflow of hearts that are filled with the love of God for those who do not yet know him.”<sup>18</sup> At Pentecost, the disciples could not but declare the mighty works of God (Acts 2:4; 4:20). Evangelism, while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional articulation of the gospel, including “the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship”.<sup>19</sup> While the Holy Spirit calls some to be evangelists (Ephesians 4:11), we all are called to give an account of the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). Not only individuals but also the whole church together is called to evangelize (Mark 16:15; 1 Peter 2:9).
82. Today’s world is marked by excessive assertion of religious identities and persuasions that seem to break and brutalize in the name of God rather than heal and nurture communities. In such a context, it is important to recognize that proselytism is not a legitimate way of practising evangelism.<sup>20</sup> The Holy Spirit chooses to work in partnership with peoples’ preaching and demonstration of the good news (cf. Romans 10:14-15; 2 Corinthians 4:2-6), but it is only God’s Spirit who creates new life and brings about rebirth (John 3:5-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6). We acknowledge that evangelism at times has been distorted and lost its credibility because some Christians have forced “conversions” by violent means or the abuse of power. In some contexts, however, accusations of forceful conversions are motivated by the desire of dominant groups to keep the marginalized living with oppressed identities and in dehumanizing conditions.
83. Evangelism is sharing one’s faith and conviction with other people, inviting them to discipleship, whether or not they adhere to other religious traditions. Such sharing is to take place with both confidence and humility, and as an expression of our professed love for our world. If we claim to love God and to love our fellow human beings but fail to share the good news with them urgently and consistently, we deceive ourselves as to the integrity of our love for either God or people. There is no greater gift we can offer to our fellow human beings than to share and or introduce them to the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ.
84. Evangelism leads to repentance, faith and baptism. Hearing the truth in the face of sin and evil demands a response – positive or negative (John 4:28-29 cf. Mark 10:22). It provokes conversion, involving a change of attitudes, priorities and goals. It results in salvation of the lost, healing of the sick and the liberation of the oppressed and the whole creation.
85. “Evangelism”, while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional articulation of the gospel, including “the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ and to discipleship”.<sup>21</sup> In different churches, there are differing understandings of how the Spirit calls us to evangelize in our contexts. For some, evangelism is primarily about leading people to personal conversion through Jesus Christ; for others, evangelism is about being in solidarity and offering Christian witness through presence with oppressed peoples; others again look on evangelism as one component of God’s mission. Different Christian traditions denote aspects of mission and evangelism in different ways; however, we can still affirm that the Spirit calls us all towards an understanding of evangelism which is grounded in the life of the local church where worship (*leiturgia*) is inextricably linked to witness (*martyria*), service (*diakonia*) and fellowship (*koinonia*).

## Evangelism in Christ's Way

86. Evangelism is sharing the good news both in word and action. Evangelizing through verbal proclamation or preaching of the gospel (*kerygma*) is profoundly biblical. However, if our words are not consistent with our actions, our evangelism is inauthentic. The combination of verbal declaration and visible action bears witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ and of his purposes. Evangelism is closely related to unity: The love for one another is a demonstration of the gospel we proclaim (John 13:34-35) while disunity is an embarrassment to the gospel (1 Corinthians 1).
87. There are historical and contemporary examples of faithful, humble service by Christians, working in their own local contexts, with whom the Spirit has partnered to bring about fullness of life. Also, many Christians who lived and worked as missionaries far away from their own cultural contexts did so with humility, mutuality, and respect; God's Spirit also stirred in those communities to bring about transformation.
88. Regrettably, sometimes evangelism has been practised in ways which betray rather than incarnate the gospel. Whenever this occurs repentance is in order. Mission in Christ's way involves affirming the dignity and rights of others. We are called to serve others as Christ did (cf. Mark 10:45; Matthew 25:45), without exploitation or any form of allurements.<sup>22</sup> In such individualized contexts, it may be possible to confuse evangelism with buying and selling a "product", where we decide what aspects of Christian life we want to take on. Instead, the Spirit rejects the idea that Jesus' good news for all can be consumed under capitalist terms, and the Spirit calls us to conversion and transformation at a personal level, which leads us to the proclamation of the fullness of life for all.
89. Authentic evangelism is grounded in humility and respect for all, and flourishes in the context of dialogue. It promotes the message of the gospel, of healing and reconciliation, in word and deed. "There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the message of God's coming reign."<sup>23</sup> Evangelism, therefore, inspires the building of inter-personal and community relationships. Such authentic relationships are often best nourished in local faith communities, and based on local cultural contexts. Christian witness is as much by our presence as by our words. In situations where the public testimony to one's faith is not possible without risking one's life, simply living the gospel may be a powerful alternative.
90. Aware of tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and varied interpretations of Christian witness, authentic evangelism must always be guided by life-affirming values, as stated in the joint statement on "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct.":
- a. Rejection of all forms of violence, discrimination and repression by religious and secular authority, including the abuse of power – psychological or social.
  - b. Affirming the freedom of religion to practise and profess faith without any fear of reprisal and or intimidation. Mutual respect and solidarity which promote justice, peace and the common good of all.
  - c. Respect for all people and human cultures, while also discerning the elements in our own cultures, such as patriarchy, racism, casteism etc., that need to be challenged by the gospel.
  - d. Renunciation of false witness and listening in order to understand in mutual respect.
  - e. Ensuring freedom for ongoing discernment by persons and communities as part of decision-making.
  - f. Building relationships with believers of other faiths or no faith to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.<sup>24</sup>
91. We live in a world strongly influenced by individualism, secularism and materialism, and other ideologies that challenge the values of the kingdom of God. Although the gospel is ultimately good news for all, it is bad news for the forces which promote falsehood, injustice and oppression. To that extent, evangelism is also a prophetic vocation which involves speaking truth to power in hope and in

love (Acts 26:25; Colossians 1:5; Ephesians 4:15). The gospel is liberative and transformative. Its proclamation must involve transformation of societies with a view to creating just and inclusive communities.

92. Standing against evil or injustice and being prophetic can sometimes be met with suppression and violence, and thus consequently lead to suffering, persecution, and even death. Authentic evangelism involves being vulnerable, following the example of Christ by carrying the cross and emptying oneself (Philippians 2:5-11). Just as the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church under Roman persecution, today the pursuit of justice and righteousness makes a powerful witness to Christ. Jesus linked such self-denial with the call to follow him and with eternal salvation (Mark 8:34-38).

### **Evangelism, Interfaith Dialogue and Christian Presence**

93. In the plurality and complexity of today's world, we encounter people of many different faiths, ideologies and convictions. We believe that the Spirit of Life brings joy and fullness of life. God's Spirit, therefore, can be found in all cultures that affirm life. The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways, and we do not fully understand the workings of the Spirit in other faith traditions. We acknowledge that there is inherent value and wisdom in diverse life-giving spiritualities. Therefore, authentic mission makes the "other" a partner in, not an "object" of mission.

94. Dialogue is a way of affirming our common life and goals in terms of the affirmation of life and the integrity of creation. Dialogue at the religious level is possible only if we begin with the expectation of meeting God who has preceded us and has been present with people within their own contexts.<sup>25</sup> God is there before we come (Acts 17) and our task is not to bring God along, but to witness to the God who is already there. Dialogue provides for an honest encounter where each party brings to the table all that they are in an open, patient and respectful manner.

95. Evangelism and dialogue are distinct but interrelated. Although Christians hope and pray that all people may come to living knowledge of the Triune God, evangelism is not the purpose of dialogue. However, since dialogue is also "a mutual encounter of commitments", sharing the good news of Jesus Christ has a legitimate place in it. Furthermore, authentic evangelism takes place in the context of the dialogue of life and action, and in "the spirit of dialogue": "an attitude of respect and friendship".<sup>26</sup> Evangelism entails not only proclamation of our deepest convictions, but also listening to others, and being challenged and enriched by others (Acts 10).

96. Particularly important is dialogue between people of different faiths, not only in multi-religious contexts but equally where there is a large majority of a particular faith. It is necessary to protect rights of minority groups and religious freedom and to enable all to contribute to the common good. Religious freedom should be upheld because it flows from the dignity of the human person, grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). Followers of all religions and beliefs have equal rights and responsibilities.<sup>27</sup>

### **Evangelism and Cultures**

97. The gospel takes root in different contexts through engagement with specific cultural, political and religious realities. Respect for people and their cultural and symbolic life-worlds are necessary if the gospel is to take root in those different realities. In this way it must begin with engagement and dialogue with the wider context in order to discern how Christ is already present and where God's Spirit is already at work.

98. The connection of evangelism with colonial powers in the history of mission has led to the presupposition that Western forms of Christianity are the standards by which other's adherence to the gospel should be judged. Evangelism by those who enjoy economic power or cultural hegemony risks

distorting the gospel. Therefore, they must seek the partnership of the poor, the dispossessed and minorities, and be shaped by their theological resources and visions.

99. The enforcement of uniformity discredits the uniqueness of each individual created in the image and likeness of God. Whereas Babel attempted to enforce uniformity, the preaching of the disciples on the day of Pentecost resulted in a unity in which personal particularities and community identities were not lost but respected – they heard the good news in their own languages.
100. Jesus calls us out of the narrow concerns of *our* own kingdom, *our* own liberation and *our* own independence (Acts 1:6) by unveiling to us a larger vision and empowering us by the Holy Spirit to go “to the ends of the earth” as witnesses in each context of time and space to God’s justice, freedom and peace. Our calling is to point all to Jesus, rather than to ourselves or our institutions, looking out for the interests of others rather than our own (cf. Philippians 2:3-4). We cannot capture the complexities of the scriptures, through one dominant cultural perspective. A plurality of cultures is a gift of the Spirit to deepen our understanding of our faith and one another. As such, intercultural communities of faith, where diverse cultural communities worship together, is one way in which cultures can engage one another authentically, and where culture can enrich gospel. At the same time, the gospel critiques notions of cultural superiority. Therefore, “the gospel, to be fruitful, needs to be both true to itself and incarnated or rooted in the culture of a people...We need constantly to seek the insight of the Holy Spirit in helping us to better discern where the gospel challenges, endorses or transforms a particular culture”<sup>28</sup> for the sake of life.

#### **FEAST OF LIFE: CONCLUDING AFFIRMATIONS**

101. We are the servants of the Triune God, who has given us the mission of proclaiming the good news to all humanity and creation, especially the oppressed and the suffering people who are longing for fullness of life. Mission – as a common witness to Christ – is an invitation to the “feast in the kingdom of God” (Luke 14:15). The mission of the church is to prepare the banquet and to invite all people to the feast of life. The feast is a celebration of creation and fruitfulness overflowing from the love of God, the source of life in abundance. It is a sign of the liberation and reconciliation of the whole creation which is the goal of mission. With a renewed appreciation of the mission of God’s Spirit, we offer the following affirmations in response to the question posed at the beginning of this document.
102. **We affirm that the purpose of God’s mission is fullness of life (John 10:10) and this is the criterion for discernment in mission.** Therefore, we are called to discern the Spirit of God wherever there is life in its fullness, particularly in terms of the liberation of the oppressed peoples, the healing and reconciliation of broken communities and the restoration of the whole creation. We are challenged to appreciate the life-affirming spirits present in different cultures and to be in solidarity with all those who are involved in the mission of affirming and preserving life. We also discern and confront evil spirits wherever forces of death and negation of life are experienced.
103. **We affirm that mission begins with God’s act of creation and continues in re-creation, by the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit, poured out in tongues of fire at Pentecost, fills our hearts and makes us into Christ’s church. The Spirit which was in Christ Jesus inspires us to a self-emptying and cross-bearing life-style and accompanies God’s people as we seek to bear witness to the love of God in word and deed. The Spirit of truth leads into all truth and empowers us to defy the demonic powers and speak the truth in love. As a redeemed community we share with others the waters of life and look for the Spirit of unity to heal, reconcile and renew the whole creation.
104. **We affirm that spirituality is the source of energy for mission and that mission in the Spirit is transformative.** Thus we seek a re-orienting of our perspective between mission, spirituality and creation. Mission spirituality that flows from liturgy and worship reconnects us with one another and with the wider creation. We understand that our participation in mission, our existence in creation and



our practice of the life of the Spirit are woven together for they are mutually transformative. Mission that begins with creation invites us to celebrate life in all its dimensions as God's gift.

105. **We affirm that the mission of God's Spirit is to renew the whole creation.** "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1, NIV). The God of life protects, loves and cares for nature. Humanity is not the master of the earth but is responsible to care for the integrity of creation. Excessive greed and unlimited consumption which lead to continuous destruction of nature must end. God's love does not proclaim a human salvation separate from the renewal of the whole creation. We are called to participate in God's mission beyond our human-centred goals. God's mission is to all life and we have to both acknowledge it and serve it in new ways of mission. We pray for repentance and forgiveness, but we also call for action now. Mission has creation at its heart.
106. **We affirm that today mission movements are emerging from the global South and East which are multi-directional and many faceted.** The shifting centre of gravity of Christianity to the global South and East challenges us to explore missiological expressions that are rooted in these contexts, cultures and spiritualities. We need to develop further mutuality and partnership and affirm interdependence within mission and the ecumenical movement. Our mission practice should show solidarity with suffering peoples and harmony with nature. Evangelism is done in self-emptying humility, with respect towards others and in dialogue with people of different cultures and faiths. It should, in this landscape, also involve confronting structures and cultures of oppression and dehumanization that are in contradiction to the values of God's reign.
107. **We affirm that marginalized people are agents of mission and exercise a prophetic role which emphasizes that fullness of life is for all.** The marginalized in society are the main partners in God's mission. Marginalized, oppressed and suffering people have a special gift to distinguish what news is good for them and what news is bad for their endangered life. In order to commit ourselves to God's life-giving mission, we have to listen to the voices from the margins to hear what is life-affirming and what is life-destroying. We must turn our direction of mission to the actions that the marginalized are taking. Justice, solidarity and inclusivity are key expressions of mission from the margins.
108. **We affirm that the economy of God is based on values of love and justice for all and that transformative mission resists idolatry in the free-market economy.** Economic globalization has effectively supplanted the God of life with mammon, the god of free-market capitalism that claims the power to save the world through the accumulation of undue wealth and prosperity. Mission in this context needs to be counter-cultural, offering alternatives to such idolatrous visions because mission belongs to the God of life, justice and peace and not to this false god who brings misery and suffering to people and nature. Mission, then, is to denounce the economy of greed and to participate in and practise the divine economy of love, sharing and justice.
109. **We affirm that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news in all ages and places and should be proclaimed in the Spirit of love and humility.** We affirm the centrality of the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection in our message and also in the way we do evangelism. Therefore, evangelism is pointing always to Jesus and the kingdom of God rather than to institutions, and it belongs to the very being of the church. The prophetic voice of the church should not be silent in times that demand this voice be heard. The church is called to renew its methods of evangelism to communicate the good news with persuasion, inspiration and conviction.
110. **We affirm that dialogue and cooperation for life are integral to mission and evangelism.** Authentic evangelism is done with respect to freedom of religion and belief, for all human beings, as images of God. Proselytism by violent means, economic incentive or abuse of power is contrary to the message of the gospel. In doing evangelism it is important to build relations of respect and trust between people of different faiths. We value each and every human culture and recognize that the gospel is not possessed by any group but is for every people. We understand that our task is not to bring God along but to

witness to the God who is already there (Acts 17:23-28). Joining in with the Spirit we are enabled to cross cultural and religious barriers to work together towards Life.

111. **We affirm that God moves and empowers the church in mission.** The church as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit is dynamic and changing as it continues the mission of God. This leads to a variety of forms of common witness, reflecting the diversity of world Christianity. Thus the churches need to be on the move, journeying together in mission, continuing in the mission of the apostles. Practically, this means that church and mission should be united, and different ecclesial and missional bodies need to work together for the sake of Life.

112. The Triune God invites the whole creation to the Feast of Life, through Jesus Christ who came "that they may have life, and may have it in all its fullness" (John 10:10, REB), through the Holy Spirit who affirms the vision of the reign of God, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth!" (Isaiah 65:17, KJV). We commit ourselves together in humility and hope to the mission of God, who recreates all and reconciles all. And we pray, "God of Life, lead us into justice and peace!"

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> If not otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. Todd M. Johnson, Kenneth R. Ross eds., *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, Geneva, WCC, 1996. The term was originally coined by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos and widely publicized by Ion Bria.
- <sup>4</sup> *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE): A Background Document*, Geneva, WCC, 2005, p.13.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Accra Confession, Covenanting for Justice: in the Economy and the Earth*, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2004, §10.
- <sup>6</sup> Edinburgh 2010, *Common Call*, 2010, § 4.
- <sup>7</sup> *Healing and Wholeness: The Churches' Role in Health*, Geneva, WCC, 1990, p.6.
- <sup>8</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper no.111, 1982, §19.
- <sup>9</sup> Thomas F. Best, Günther Gassmann eds., *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993*, Faith and Order Paper no.166, Geneva, WCC, 1994, p.254.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. "The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World: Reflections of the Lausanne Theology Working Group," 2010.
- <sup>11</sup> *Mission and Evangelism in Unity*, CWME Study Document, 2000, §13.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, in Jacques Matthey ed., *You Are the Light of the World: Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches 1980-2005*, Geneva, WCC, 2005, pp.90-162.
- <sup>13</sup> "Report of WCC Consultation on Mission and Ecclesiology of the Migrant Churches, Utrecht, the Netherlands, 16-21 November 2010," *International Review of Mission*, 100.1., 2011, pp.104-107.
- <sup>14</sup> Christopher Duraisingh ed., *Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures*, Geneva, WCC, 1998, p.54.
- <sup>15</sup> *Glory to God and Peace on Earth: The Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation*, WCC, Kingston, Jamaica, 17-25 May 2011, p.2.
- <sup>16</sup> "Diakonia in the Twenty First Century: Theological Perspectives," WCC Conference on Theology of *Diakonia* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2-6 June 2012, p.2.
- <sup>17</sup> *Minutes and Reports of the Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee*, WCC, Rolle, Switzerland, 1951, p.66.
- <sup>18</sup> The Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment*, 2010, Part I, 7(b).
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, No.12, 2007, pp. 489-504.
- <sup>20</sup> *Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism*, WCC Central Committee, 1997.
- <sup>21</sup> It is important to note that not all churches understand evangelism as expressed in the above. The Roman Catholic Church refers to "evangelization" as the *missio ad gentes* [mission to the peoples] directed to those who do not know Christ. In a wider sense, it is used to describe ordinary pastoral work, while the phrase "new evangelization" designates pastoral outreach to those who no longer practise the Christian faith. Cf. *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*.
- <sup>22</sup> World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Evangelical Alliance, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, 2011.
- <sup>23</sup> *The San Antonio Report*, p.26; *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*, §34; *Called to One Hope*, p.38.
- <sup>24</sup> *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, 2011.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. *Baar Statement: Theological Perspectives on Plurality*, WCC, 1990.
- <sup>26</sup> PCID, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 1991, §9.
- <sup>27</sup> *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, 2011.
- <sup>28</sup> *Called to One Hope*, pp.21-22; 24.





## Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All

*As a follow-up to the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) process, which concluded with the AGAPE Call presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Porto Alegre in 2006, the WCC initiated a programme focused on eradicating poverty, challenging wealth accumulation and safeguarding ecological integrity based on the understanding that Poverty, Wealth and Ecology (PWE) are integrally related. The PWE programme engaged in on-going dialogue between religious, economic and political actors. Participants included ecumenical leaders, representatives and leaders of churches from all over the world, interfaith partners, leaders of government and social service organizations, and it represented a rich variety of the world's regions and nations. Regional studies and consultations took place in Africa (Dar es Salaam) in 2007, Latin America and the Caribbean (Guatemala City) in 2008, Asia and the Pacific (Chiang Mai) in 2009, Europe (Budapest) in 2010 and North America (Calgary) in 2011. The programme culminated in a Global Forum and AGAPE celebration in Bogor, Indonesia in 2012. The call to action that follows is the result of a six-year process of consultations and regional studies linking poverty, wealth and ecology.*

### Preamble

1. This call to action comes in a time of dire necessity. People and the Earth are in peril due to the over-consumption of some growing inequalities as evidenced in the persistent poverty of many in contrast to the extravagant wealth of a few, and intertwined global financial, socio-economic, ecological and climate crises. Throughout our dialogue, we as participants in consultations and regional studies expressed differing, sometimes even contrasting, perspectives. We also grew to share a common consciousness that life in the global community as we know it today will come to an end if we fail to confront the sins of egotism, callous disregard and greed which lie at the root of these crises. With a sense of urgency, we bring this dialogue to the churches as a call to action. This urgency is born of our profound hope and belief: *An Economy of Life is not only possible, it is in the making – and God's justice lies at its very foundation!*

### Theological and Spiritual Affirmations of Life

2. The belief that God created human beings as part of a larger web of life and affirmed the goodness of the whole creation (Genesis 1) lies at the heart of biblical faith. The whole community of living organisms that grows and flourishes is an expression of God's will and works together to bring life from and give life to the land, to connect one generation to the next, and to sustain the abundance and diversity of God's household (*oikos*). Economy in God's household emerges from God's gracious offering of abundant life for *all* (John 10:10). We are inspired by Indigenous Peoples' image of "Land is Life" (*Macling Dulag*) which recognizes that the lives of people and the land are woven together in mutual interdependence. Thus, we express our belief that the "creation's life and God's life are intertwined" (*Commission on World Mission and Evangelism*) and that God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).
3. Christian and many other expressions of spirituality teach us that the "good life" lies not in the competitive quest for possessions, the accumulation of wealth, fortresses and stockpiles of armaments to provide for our security, or in using our own power to lord it over others (James 3: 13-18). We affirm the "good life" (*Sumak Kausay* in the Kichua language and the concept of *Waniambi a Tobati Engros* from West Papua) modelled by the communion of the Trinity in mutuality, shared partnership, reciprocity, justice and loving-kindness.

4. The groaning of the Creation and the cries of people in poverty (Jeremiah 14:2-7) alert us to just how much our current social, political, economic and ecological state of emergency runs counter to God's vision for life in abundance. Many of us too easily deceive ourselves into thinking that human desires stand at the centre of God's universe. We construct divisions, barriers and boundaries to distance ourselves from neighbour, nature and God's justice. Communities are fragmented and relationships broken. Our greed and self-centredness endanger both people and planet Earth.
5. We are called to turn away from works that bring death and to be transformed into a new life (*metanoia*). Jesus calls humanity to repent of our sins of greed and egotism, to renew our relationships with the others and creation, to restore the image of God, and to begin a new way of life as a partner of God's life-affirming mission. The call of the prophets is heard anew from and through people submerged in poverty by our current economic system and those most affected by climate change: Do justice and bring a new Earth into being!
6. Our vision of justice is rooted in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ who drove money changers from the temple (Matthew 21:12), made the weak strong and strong weak (1 Corinthians 1:25-28), and redefined views of poverty and wealth (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus identified himself with the marginalized and excluded people not only out of compassion, but because their lives testified to the sinfulness of the systems and structures. Our faith compels us to seek justice, to witness to the presence of God and to be part of the lives and struggles of people made weak and vulnerable by structures and cultures—women, children, people living in poverty in both urban and rural areas, Indigenous Peoples, racially oppressed communities, people with disabilities, Dalits, forced migrant workers, refugees and religious ethnic minorities. Jesus says "Whatever you did to the least of these you did to me" (Matthew 25: 40).
7. We must embody a "transformative spirituality" (*Commission on World Mission and Evangelism*) that re-connects us to others (*Ubuntu* and *Sansaeng*), motivates us to serve the common good, emboldens us to stand against all forms of marginalization, seeks the redemption of the whole Earth, resists life-destroying values and inspires us to discover innovative alternatives. This spirituality provides the means to discover the grace to be satisfied with enough, while sharing with any who have need (Acts 4:35).
8. Churches must be challenged to remember, hear and heed Christ's call today: "The time has come ... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). We are called to be transformed, to continue Christ's acts of healing and reconciliation and "to be what [we] have been sent to be a people of God and a community in the world" (*Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology in Africa*). Therefore, the Church is God's agent for transformation. The Church is a community of disciples of Jesus Christ, who affirms the fullness of life for all, against any denial of life.

### **Intertwined and Urgent Crises**

9. Our present stark global reality is so fraught with death and destruction that we will not have a future to speak of unless the prevailing development paradigm is radically transformed and justice and sustainability become the driving force for the economy, society and the Earth. Time is running out.
10. We discern the fatal intertwining of the global financial, socio-economic, climate, and ecological crises accompanied in many places of the world by the suffering of people and their struggle for life. Far-reaching market liberalization, deregulation and unrestrained privatization of goods and services are exploiting the whole Creation and dismantling social programs and services and opening up economies across borders to seemingly limitless growth of production. Uncontrolled financial flows destabilize the economies of an increasing number of countries all over the world. Various aspects of climate, ecological, financial and debt crises are mutually dependent and reinforce each other. They cannot be treated separately anymore.

11. Climate change and threats to the integrity of creation have become the significant challenge of the multifaceted crises that we have to confront. Climate change directly impacts peoples' livelihoods, endangers the existence of small island states, reduces the availability of fresh water and diminishes Earth's biodiversity. It has far-reaching impacts on food security, the health of people and the living habits of growing part of population. Due to climate change, life in its many forms as we know it can be irreversibly changed within the span of a few decades. Climate change leads to the displacement of people, to the increase of forced climate migration, and to armed conflicts. Unprecedented challenges of climate change go hand-in-hand with the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and leads to the destruction of the Earth and to a substantial change of the habitat. Global warming and ecological destruction become more and more a question of life or death.
12. Our world has never been more prosperous, and, at the same time, more inequitable than it is today. Inequality has reached a level that we can no longer afford to ignore. People who have been submerged into poverty, driven into overwhelming debt, marginalized, and displaced are crying out with a greater sense of urgency and clarity than ever before. The global community must recognize the need for all of us to join hands together and to do justice in the face of unparalleled and catastrophic inequalities in the distribution of wealth.
13. Greed and injustice, seeking easy profit, unjust privileges and short-term advantages at the expense of long term and sustainable aims are root causes of the intertwined crises and cannot be overlooked. These life-destroying values have slowly crept in to dominate today's structures and lead to lifestyles that fundamentally defy the regenerative limits of the Earth and the rights of human beings and other forms of life. Therefore, the crisis has deep moral and existential dimensions. The challenges that are posed are not first and foremost technological and financial, but ethical and spiritual.
14. Market fundamentalism is more than an economic paradigm: it is a social and moral philosophy. During the last thirty years, market faith based on unbridled competition and expressed by calculating and monetizing all aspects of life has overwhelmed and determined the direction of our systems of knowledge, science, technology, public opinion, media and even education. This dominating approach has funnelled wealth primarily toward those who are already rich and allowed humans to plunder resources of the natural world far beyond its limits to increase their own wealth. The neoliberal paradigm lacks the self-regulating mechanisms to deal with the chaos it creates with far-reaching impacts, especially for the impoverished and marginalized.
15. This ideology is permeating all features of life, destroying it from the inside as well as from the outside, as it seeps into the lives of families and local communities, wreaks havoc upon the natural environment and traditional life-forms and cultures, and spoils the future of the Earth. The dominant global economic system in this way threatens to put an end to both the conditions for peaceful coexistence and life as we know it.
16. The one-sided belief that social benefits automatically follow from economic (GDP) growth is misguided. Economic growth without constraints strangles the flourishing of our own natural habitat: climate change, deforestation, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss and so on. The ecological commons have been degraded and appropriated, through the use of military force, by the political and economic elite. Over-consumption based on the costs of uncovered debts generates massive social and ecological indebtedness, which are owed by the developed countries of global North to the global South, as well as indebtedness over against the Earth, is unjust and creates enormous pressure on future generations. The notion that the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24: 1; 1 Corinthians 10: 26) has been dismissed.

### **Well-Springs of Justice**

17. We confess that churches and church members are complicit in the unjust system when they partake in unsustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption and remain entangled in the economy of greed. There are churches who continue to preach theologies of prosperity, self-righteousness, domination, individualism and convenience. Some support theologies of charity rather than justice for the

impoverished. Others fail to question and even legitimize systems and ideologies founded on unlimited growth and accumulation, and ignore the reality of ecological destruction and the plights of victims of globalization. Some focus on short-term, quantifiable results at the expense of deep-seated, qualitative changes. However, we are also aware that even when many fail to examine and change their own production, consumption and investment behaviour, an increasing number of churches from all continents are stepping up their efforts and expressing their belief that transformation is possible.

18. Ultimately, our hope springs from Christ's resurrection and promise of life for all. We see evidence of that resurrection hope in the churches and movements committed to making a better world. They are the light and salt of the Earth. We are profoundly inspired by numerous examples of transformation from within the family of churches and in growing movements of women, people in poverty, youth, people with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples who are building an Economy of Life and promoting a flourishing ecology.

19. People of faith, Christian, Muslim and Indigenous leaders in the Philippines, have given their lives to maintain their connection to and to continue to sustain themselves from the land to which they belong. Churches in South America, Africa and Asia are conducting audits of external debts and challenging mining and resource-extractive companies to be accountable for human rights violations and environmental damages. Churches in Latin America and Europe are sharing and learning from differing experiences with globalization and working towards defining common but differentiated responsibilities, building solidarity and strategic alliances. Christians are defining indicators of greed and conducting intentional dialogues with Buddhists and Muslims which discover common ground in the fight against greed. Churches in partnership with civil society are engaged in discussing the parameters of a new international financial and economic architecture, promoting life-giving agriculture and building economies of solidarity.

20. Women have been developing feminist theologies that challenge patriarchal systems of domination as well as feminist economics that embed the economy in society and society in ecology. Youth are in the forefront of campaigns for simple living and alternative lifestyles. Indigenous Peoples are making demands for holistic reparations and the recognition of Earth rights to address social and ecological debt.

### **Commitments and Call**

21. The 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC is meeting at a time when the vibrant life of God's whole creation may be extinguished by human methods of wealth creation. God calls us to a radical transformation. Transformation will not be without sacrifice and risk, but our faith in Christ demands that we commit ourselves to be transformative churches and transformative congregations. We must cultivate the moral courage necessary to witness to a spirituality of justice and sustainability, and build a prophetic movement for an Economy of Life for all. This entails mobilizing people and communities, providing the required resources (funds, time and capacities), and developing more cohesive and coordinated programs geared toward transforming economic systems, production, distribution, and consumption patterns, cultures and values.

22. The process of transformation must uphold human rights, human dignity and human accountability to all God's creation. We have a responsibility that lies beyond our individual selves and national interests to create sustainable structures that will allow future generations to have enough. Transformation must embrace those who suffer the most from systemic marginalization, such as people in poverty, women, Indigenous Peoples and persons living with disabilities. Nothing planned without them is for them. We must challenge ourselves and overcome structures and cultures of domination and self-destruction that are rending the social and ecological fabric of life. Transformation must be guided by the mission to heal and renew the whole creation.

23. Therefore, we call on the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Busan to commit to strengthening the role of the WCC in convening churches, building a common voice, fostering ecumenical cooperation and ensuring greater coherence for the realization of an Economy of Life for all. In particular, the critical work on building a new international financial and economic architecture (*WCC Statement on Just Finance and an Economy of Life*),



challenging wealth accumulation and systemic greed and promoting anti-greed measures (*Report of the Greed Line Study Group*), redressing ecological debt and advancing eco-justice (*WCC Statement on Eco-justice and Ecological Debt*) must be prioritized and further deepened in the coming years.

24. We further call on the 10<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly in Busan to set aside a period of time between now and the next Assembly for churches to focus on faith commitments to an “Economy of Life – Living for God’s Justice in Creation [Justice and Peace for All].” The process will enable the fellowship of churches to derive fortitude and hope from each other, strengthen unity and deepen common witness on critical issues that lie at the very core of our faith.

25. The statement on “Just Finance and an Economy of Life” calls for an ethical, just and democratic international financial regime “grounded on a framework of common values: honesty, social justice, human dignity, mutual accountability and ecological sustainability” (*WCC Statement on Just Finance and an Economy of Life*). We can and must shape an Economy of Life that engenders participation for all in decision-making processes that impact lives, provides for people’s basic needs through just livelihoods, values and supports social reproduction and care work done primarily by women, and protects and preserves the air, water, land, and energy sources that are necessary to sustain life (*Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology in Asia and the Pacific*). The realization of an Economy of Life will entail a range of strategies and methodologies, including, but not limited to: critical self-reflection and radical spiritual renewal; rights-based approaches; the creation and multiplication of spaces for the voices of the marginalized to be heard in as many arenas as possible; open dialogue between global North and global South, between churches, civil society and state actors, and among various disciplines and world faiths to build synergies for resistance to structures and cultures that deny life in dignity for many; taxation justice; and the organization of a broad platform for common witness and advocacy.

26. The process is envisioned as a flourishing space where churches can learn from each other and from other faith traditions and social movements about how a transformative spirituality can counter and resist life-destroying values and overcome complicity in the economy of greed. It will be a space to learn what an Economy of Life means, theologically and practically, by reflecting together and sharing what concrete changes are needed in various contexts. It will be a space to develop joint campaigns and advocacy activities at the national, regional and global levels with a view to enabling policy and systemic changes leading to poverty eradication and wealth redistribution; ecologically-respectful production, consumption and distribution; and to develop healthy, equitable, post-fossil fuel and peace-loving societies.

*God of Life calls us to justice and peace.  
Come to God’s table of sharing!  
Come to God’s table of life!  
Come to God’s table of love!*





## Theological Perspectives on Diakonia

*From the Conference jointly organized by  
Justice and Diakonia, Just and Inclusive Communities, and Mission and Evangelism  
programmes  
of the World Council of Churches  
in Colombo, Sri Lanka, June 2-6, 2012*

*This theological reflection is intentionally inductive – contextual and experiential. The 50 participants involved in various diaconal initiatives in about 25 countries brought with them some hard questions as well as insights on new possibilities, arising out of their engagement in the lives of marginalized people. They put forth some of the following challenges to be taken into account in this reflection on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century. These were: the institutionalization of injustice, particularly in the present regime of neo-liberal economic globalization; the reality of climate change and its impact; wars and conflicts and the consequent destruction, trauma and broken relationships; the fragmentation of communities due to aggressive assertion of religious and ethnic identities; the dispossession and displacement of vulnerable people; the violence against many sections of society, especially of women, children, people with disabilities and the aged; malnutrition, disease and the HIV and Aids pandemic; and the marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities, Indigenous peoples, the Afro-descendent communities, the Dalits in South Asia and others experiencing discrimination for various reasons.*

*Sri Lanka, a nation ravaged by prolonged war and conflict, struggling to find possibilities for healing and hope, provided the context of this conference. The conference was hosted by the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka that represents the witness of churches – small, on the margins with limited space for public engagement, and each with a distinct identity, yet united in their witness to heal and reconcile. The conference, therefore, opted to look at diakonia from three specific vantage points as elaborated below:*

*First, it pursued its reflection by holding diakonia as a primary expression of the churches' participation in the ongoing mission of God. This option was chosen to assert that churches are not to be exclusive, inward-looking religious communities, but have a calling to be engaged with the world. The event also responded to the common tendency to view and pursue diakonia in institutional forms and to respond only to those challenges that these forms would allow.*

*Second, it attempted to re-imagine diakonia from the vantage point of those who are, in many cases, traditionally considered as recipients or objects of churches' diakonia – the vulnerable and marginalized communities. Besides the theological reasons, this option was taken to search for more people-based and less resource-intensive forms of diakonia, arising out of their aspirations, and in doing so to ensure their agency in redefining diakonia in today's world. It was also to suggest a possible shift from patronizing interventions to catalytic accompaniment.*

*And third, in view of the fact that many of the current models of diakonia were shaped by the perceptions and preferences of the churches in the geo-political North, the conference wanted to explore what diakonia would be if seen from the vantage point of the global South where the dynamics of life are radically different. Incidentally, more Christians live in the South than the North, mostly as fragmented minority communities, often in hostile contexts, as socially and economically marginalized, and amid intense struggles for life. This preference for the South does not imply that the global North lacks these same challenges or possibilities. Neither does it imply a rejection of the contributions of churches in the North to diakonia and this reflection. This choice was made deliberately, in view of the variety of life-expressions as well as Christian expressions that the South offers, and in an effort to address some of the complex questions arising there about the human predicament and the fate and future of the earth.*

*The following is a summary of reflections on the theme as seen from the vantage points mentioned above.*

## I. Church, Mission and Diakonia

*“As the Father has sent me, so I send you...” (John 20:21)*

1. God’s mission is about the realization of God’s vision for the world, a world in which “God rejoices because there shall no more be the sound of weeping, or the cry of distress, where people shall not die young, where people build houses and live in them and enjoy the fruits of their labour, where people will not die of calamities, and where the aggressors are transformed so that all shall live in peace.” (Isaiah 65:17-25) This eschatological hope of a “new heaven and earth” (Revelation 21:1) is not passive but constantly breaks into our present, inviting people to become co-workers with God by realizing it in every here and now. This mission of God is dynamic and inclusive of all people and forces that uphold the sanctity and integrity of God’s creation.
2. The Church, as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in this mission through its very being, proclamation and service. Commonly understood as service, diakonia is a way of living out faith and hope as a community, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ.
3. Through its diakonia, the Church witnesses to God’s purpose in Jesus Christ and participates in God’s mission. In its diakonia, the Church follows the way of its Servant Lord who claimed that he came to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:45). In Christ, the Church is called to hold forth the power of service over the power of domination, so that life, in all its fullness, may be possible for all. Therefore, the Church presents itself not only as a sign of the coming reign of God but also of the way leading to it, Christ’s way.
4. As a diaconal community, the church is called to live out its Christian witness both at local and larger as well as personal and corporate levels. This is to be reflected in all the different expressions of being Church: in worship and proclamation, in practices of hospitality and visitation (Hebrews 13:1-3), in public witness and advocacy. As “liturgy after the Liturgy” – empowered by what faith celebrates - diakonia involves actions of care, relief and service, but goes further and addresses the root causes of injustice embedded in oppressive systems and structures. Sustained action for justice is upheld by our faith in and allegiance to the God of life when faced with the death-dealing powers of Empire.
5. Every Christian community in every geo-political and socio-economic context is called to be a diaconal community, witnessing to God’s transforming grace through acts of service that hold forth the promise of God’s reign. It heals relationships, and nurtures partnerships for the sake of God’s good creation. In bringing people and communities together around issues of life and of justice and peace, diakonia stands out as a reason for unity and as such also needs to be seen as its instrument. As an expression of participation in God’s mission in the world, diakonia is beyond all parochial interests or the agenda of religious propagation.
6. Some of the larger institutional expressions of diakonia must be affirmed for their role in enabling human resource development, meeting human need in crisis situations, and for advancing the causes of justice and economic development of the vulnerable people. Since some of these and other traditional forms of diakonia have tended to rely on infrastructure, institutions, expertise and resources, many Christian communities have come to see themselves either as supporters or as beneficiaries and rarely as participants in diakonia. Such specialized ministries do not replace the mandate of every Christian community to be diaconal.
7. As a response in faith to the hope of the coming reign of God, the signs of which are present in all experiences of hope amidst turmoil, in actions that heal and nurture people and relationships, in struggles that seek justice and affirm truth, diakonia has to be dynamic, contextual, and versatile. It must effect partnerships, not only at the level of global or larger church structures, but also among

congregations, special ministries, and networks of people committed to values of justice, peace and human dignity at local, regional and national levels.

## II. The diakonia of the marginalized people

*"The stone that was rejected..." (Psalm 118:22, Acts 4:11)*

8. For many, diakonia is a Christian response to people in need and situations of crisis, and is characterized by actions of reaching out to them from locations of power and privilege with resources and infrastructure. Such an understanding has often resulted in viewing those in need as objects or recipients of diakonia. Many philanthropic or humanitarian initiatives are also guided by such attitudes. Such an understanding has not only failed to acknowledge the diakonia of the marginalized people but also treated them as mere objects and recipients. Some forms of diakonia have been pursued without attitudes of respect, awareness of the potential or a spirit of partnership with local communities.
9. Some diaconal initiatives which began with the intention of serving the weak and the vulnerable people, over the years have become instruments of service to the privileged and affluent sections of the society. Unfortunately, service to the poor is hardly the objective of some Christian educational and health institutions in many parts of the world today. Furthermore, the overwhelming culture of globalization with its accents on profit-making and consumerism has also introduced new meanings to service, resulting in the co-option of the traditional service structures into meeting the requirements of economic activity and interests. Because of this trend, reaching out to those disempowered by social and economic structures does not seem a priority for some churches anymore. Some other diaconal initiatives have also been used as means of proselytism. Diakonia is integral to who we are as Christians, and diaconal initiatives should not be misused. Repenting for these and other ways in which the churches have deviated from the path of God's mission is urgent and essential for their credibility and integrity.
10. Even if they do not have the material and financial resources to do diakonia in the way many churches are accustomed to, marginalized people, through their lives and everyday resistance, practise diakonia. They testify to the sinfulness of the world, holding it accountable for its complicity and silence. Therefore, God opts for the marginalized people not because they are weak by choice, nor because of paternalistic compassion, but primarily because their lives point towards the urgent need of social transformation.
11. The world may tend to see the margins as places of disgrace and powerlessness; however, the biblical witness points towards God who is always present in the struggles of those unjustly pushed to the margins of society. It gives several accounts of God's attention and caring love to people in situations of oppression and consequent depravation. God hears the cry of the oppressed and responds by sustaining and accompanying them in their journey towards liberation. (Exodus 3:7-8). This is the diakonia of God: a diakonia of liberation as well as of restoring dignity, and ensuring justice and peace.
12. "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46) This critical question indicates the decisive entry point that God made for this mission when sending the Son into the world. Jesus announces his diakonia as one that liberates the oppressed, opens the eyes that are blind, and heals the sick. (Luke 4: 16f) By asserting time and again that he has come to seek the lost and the least, Jesus constantly locates himself among the marginalized of his time. His diakonia rejects abusive power (Luke 4:1-12), refuses to be co-opted by the prevailing logic of power (Mark 10.45) and defies oppressive religious traditions (Luke 11:37-54). Instead, his diakonia opts to restore the ones who are denied life, even if these actions ultimately led him to the cross. [e.g. the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-6)]. Through such an option, he exposes and confronts the forces of marginalization. To

that extent, the margins are the privileged spaces for God's compassion and justice and of God's presence in vulnerability and resistance. Here the sick were healed, the domination of evil spirits broken, the dignity of the marginalized defended, and the disciples empowered with life-affirming values for ministry.

13. Furthermore, marginalized people are not to be seen always as those in need and despair. They resist injustice and oppression in their own ways and through their struggles for life, justice, dignity and rights for themselves and for all, unveil the presence and power of God in their lives. For example, people with disabilities are promoting the values of sensitivity and partnership; the Afro-descendent communities, the Dalits and other discriminated communities are calling churches and communities to resist and overcome cultures and practices that discriminate and dehumanize millions of people; the Indigenous peoples are advocating for the value of the interconnectedness of life, even as their own lives and lands are threatened; young people in disadvantaged situations are resisting policies that deprive them of opportunities for education and employment; and vulnerable migrant workers, through their struggles for human rights, dignity and justice, are challenging political systems that deny them basic human rights in the name of national interests. There are many such expressions in every part of the world, in the global south as well as in the global north. In all such expressions, in their actions and allegiances towards liberation and transformation, the churches today have new possibilities of diakonia as well as of new ecclesial self-discovery. Diakonia of the marginalized, then, is crucial for church's engagement in realizing God's *oikoumene*, the alternative vision of the world.
14. From a theological perspective the language of marginalized people may be conceived as a way of labelling or of reducing people to victims of systems and structures. Diakonia, however, must acknowledge the destructive and dehumanizing power of such structures, not only in order to point to the tragic effects of their reality, but also to the demands, legitimate rights and power of marginalized people to transform the world. In a world where people are treated as objects and commodities and are also mistreated on account of their identities such as gender, ethnicity, colour, caste, age, disability, sexual orientation and economic and cultural locations, diakonia must build persons and communities, affirm the dignity of all people, and transform cultures and practices that discriminate and abuse some people.
15. Marginalized people, through their yearnings for life with dignity and justice and through their participation in movements, are offering alternative visions of a world free of forces that deny justice, dignity and life for many. To many churches this is a demanding challenge but even more a liberating promise for renewing traditional models of diaconal practice and theological reflection, towards new patterns of inclusiveness, sharing and transformative action. Jesus too found himself among the marginalized of his time as he began his ministry of announcing the coming reign of God. A majority of Christian congregations around the world are made up of people who are mostly poor and marginalized on account of several factors, and this reality needs to be seen as an opportunity and a resource for more authentic ecumenical engagement. Partnership and solidarity with the marginalized alone will ensure the credibility of the churches' claim of their participation in the mission of God.

### III. Diakonia for transformation

*"To do justice and to love kindness." (Micah 6:8)*

16. Diakonia, then, is service that makes the celebration of life possible for all. It is faith effecting change, transforming people and situations so that God's reign may be real in the lives of all people, in every here and now.
17. The God of the Bible seeks and effects change in concrete situations of life, especially of those who are denied the same. Therefore, diakonia as an action in God's love must strive to transform people, systems and cultures. God announces judgment upon those who abuse power and deny justice to the

poor. Jesus too challenged unjust systems and practices and called the powerful and privileged who benefit from such, to repent and be transformed by the values of love, sharing, truthfulness and humility.

18. Diakonia is not limited to binding the wounds of the victims or doing acts of compassion. While such expressions of love and care are necessary, they do not preclude efforts aimed at confronting and transforming the forces and factors which cause suffering and deprivation. Diaconal ministry thus involves both comforting the victim and confronting "the powers and principalities" (Ephesians 6:12). It must heal the victim as well as the one who victimizes. It is a radical spirituality of struggle and commitment for transformation of sinful social structures and for the liberation of their victims. Without transformative work, diakonia would be a mere expression of service, subtly serving the interests of the oppressive and exploitative powers by covering up their complicity. If it does not challenge injustice and abuse of power, it ceases to be authentic diakonia.
19. Diakonia also does not settle for superficial expressions of peace and good will. Resonating with the indignation of prophet Jeremiah, "They have healed the brokenness of my people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace." (Jer.6:14), diakonia exposes such attempts of the powerful and privileged, often done to sustain the unjust and oppressive status quo. Diakonia is prophetic action which also involves speaking truth to powers.
20. In today's world, diakonia may also imply political action, confronting unjust military and economic powers; questioning the state policies that seem to invest more on defence rather than on people's basic needs and human development; challenging anti-immigration laws that deny the dispossessed and the displaced their right to live; opposing development policies that destroy the earth and its people; and in working with and advocating for the rights of people who have been made vulnerable by social and economic structures.
21. Diakonia may also imply social action, aimed at dismantling oppressive cultures such as patriarchy, racism, casteism, xenophobia and other discriminatory and exclusionary practices. The churches too need to repent for the presence and practice of these cultures right within and for their derisive attitudes and theological constructions that stigmatize certain sections of society.
22. However, diakonia does not merely resist and confront evil but also proposes alternatives to the ways in which human beings relate with one another and with nature. To that extent, diakonia is transformative (Romans 12:2). Jesus, our Servant Lord, called those who followed him to be the salt of the earth, the light, and the leaven of the world (Matthew 5:13,14); in other words, to be agents of change and transformation. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the diakonia of the early Christian community resisted the power of the Empire by proposing alternative values and visions of the world. Diakonia, then, besides being an expression of support and help to those in need, is essentially a creative action meant to bring about the world God so desires.

#### IV. Challenges and Opportunities

*"I am about to do a new thing!" (Isaiah 43:19)*

21. In addition to the challenges, the context of the Twenty-First century presents numerous initiatives and struggles of people for freedom, justice, dignity and life in many parts of the world. Here lie new opportunities for churches to attempt diakonia in many creative ways while rediscovering themselves afresh in the process. There may be many other opportunities and possibilities, specific to each context. The following insightful suggestions, shared during the conference, may be considered for further reflection and action:

**a. Diakonia of the local congregations**

1. Become aware of the social, political and economic realities of life and people within which they exist as diaconal communities. Christian education must aim at cultivating a sense of social responsibility.
2. Strive to recognize and affirm the theological significance of diakonia through worship and proclamation. Church needs to be a training ground for creative engagement with the world.
3. Initiate people-level action on environmental issues.
4. Firmly respond to the reality of abuse and violence against women at home, community and church.
5. Educate people against alcoholism and substance abuse, enabling the victims to overcome these conditions.
6. Be and become open, just, hospitable and inclusive communities. Churches must strive to become discrimination-free zones and sanctuaries of safety and hope.
7. Build capacities among members, especially in areas of counselling, de-addiction programmes, educational and employment opportunities, gender sensitivity etc.
8. Seek cooperation and collaboration with other churches, other faith communities, and people's initiatives on relevant issues of people and life in each specific context. This may also include affirming diaconal actions as well as sharing resources.

**b. Diakonia of the larger church bodies**

1. Encourage, support and accompany local churches as they respond to their own issues by developing and implementing diaconal work.
2. Encourage expressions of solidarity and mutual responsibility, especially by bridging the divide between urban and rural, affluent and poor, established and migrant congregations, among others.
3. Address issues of discrimination and exclusion within the church itself and launch campaigns to end the same, both within and outside.
4. Develop policies and programmes around issues of HIV/AIDS, disability, poverty, food security and environmental stewardship.
5. Recognize, strengthen and support prophetic voices and initiatives that strive to uphold the causes of human rights, justice and rights of the marginalized communities.
6. Build partnerships with regional and national level churches and organizations with a view to encourage grassroots, people-based initiatives.
7. Encourage theological institutions to introduce diakonia as a discipline wherever necessary, and also to initiate advanced study and research on relevant diaconal practices.
8. Develop easily readable Bible study materials on diakonia for pastors and lay people.
9. Engage in diaconal actions with people from different faith communities.

**c. Diakonia of the WCC and similar international organizations**

1. Recognize diakonia as an essential ecclesial expression, and that their organizations' primary calling is not only to attempt certain diaconal actions on the behalf of churches but necessarily to accompany the initiatives of the churches. This may also include capacity-building, fostering partnerships, and mobilization of resources wherever necessary.
2. Journey with the people, communities and congregations in their struggles against discrimination and marginalization.
3. Advocate for the causes of justice, dignity and peace and for the victims of aggression, displacement and dispossession.
4. Support and accompany grassroots level people's initiatives for change. Some of these may not have the needed visibility and infrastructural presence to attract support.
5. Facilitate dialogue with international diaconal agencies to encourage patterns of church cooperation and to foster mutual accountability.
6. Prepare resources and facilitate processes for inter-church exchange of theological support for creative diaconal engagement in different contexts.
7. Recognize the power of solidarity in struggle for transformation and therefore, enable, encourage and nurture such expressions of solidarity at all levels.



22. Understood this way at this moment in time, Diakonia may sometimes involve confrontation with powers vested in the status quo. Risk may be inevitable at times, requiring an attitude of love, humility, courage and commitment. Jesus insists that discipleship seeks expression under the shadow of the cross (Matthew 16: 24). Therefore, as communities called together to a vocation of service in the way of Christ, who laid down his life while serving, the churches may encourage one another in the words of the First Letter of Peter: "Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make the defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (I Peter 3: 13-16).





## Unity Statement

**Recommended action:** That the central committee discuss the draft unity statement; affirm the direction of the work; encourage consultation with members of commissions and consultative bodies on the draft; and ask the executive committee to submit, on behalf of the central committee, the draft to the assembly for approval.

### GOD'S CREATION AND OUR UNITY

The whole of creation is a gift from God. It is the will of God that the whole creation, things in heaven and things on earth, should be brought to ultimate unity and communion in Christ and with Christ (Eph 1:10). We celebrate creation's life and diversity and give thanks for its goodness (Gen. 1).

#### Our Experience

The world and its people live in the tension between the profoundest hope and the deepest despair. We give thanks for the diversity of human cultures, for the wonder of knowledge and discovery, for communities being rebuilt and enemies reconciled, for people being healed and populations fed. These are signs of hope, peace and new beginnings. But we grieve that there are also places where God's children cry out. Social and economic injustice, poverty and famine have ravaged our world. There is violence and terrorism, the threat of nuclear war and of all wars. Many suffer from AIDS and other epidemics, peoples are displaced and their lands are dispossessed. We are all in danger of being disconnected from earth and alienated from our cultures. Creation has been misused and we all face threats to the balance of life, a growing ecological crisis and the effects of climate change. These are signs of disordered relations with God and creation, and we confess that they dishonour the gift of life.

Within the churches, we experience the same tension between celebration and sorrow. There are signs of vibrant life and creative energy in the growth of Christian communities around the world with a new and unprecedented diversity. There is a deepening sense among churches of needing one another and of being called by Christ to be in unity. But there are also painful experiences of situations where diversity has turned into division, and we do not always recognise the face of Christ in each other. Too easily we withdraw into our own traditions. For some, the creative new life of faith seems not to embrace the yearning for unity or the longing of fellowship with others. We all may be held back as some grow weary or disappointed on the ecumenical path.

Although we gratefully receive the holy gifts of God, yet, as those with human failings, we do not always honour the God who is the source of our life. Our abuse of life, our refusal to pursue justice, our unwillingness to live in peace and our practices of exclusion, exploitation and marginalisation mean that we, as Christians, have not yet fully received together the gifts of God's life. Increasingly, we recognize that we are called to share with, and learn from, those of other faiths, to work with them in common efforts for justice and peace and for the preservation of the integrity of God's beautiful but hurting creation. These deepening relations and opportunities for shared service bring delights, new challenges and enlarge our understanding.

## Our shared scriptural vision

Through the reading of the Scriptures together our eyes are opened to the place of the community of God's people, the Church, within creation. As men and women created in the image and likeness of God, given the responsibility for the stewardship of life, we wait with eager longing for God to renew the whole creation (Rom 8: 22). God's people are called to work for justice and peace, to care for the poor, the outcast, the marginalized, to be a light to the nations. God sent Jesus Christ who through his death on the Cross destroyed the walls of separation and hostility, and brought about genuine unity and reconciliation in his own body (Eph 2: 14-16). By his dying and by his resurrection and through the power of the Holy Spirit, a new way of living in communion with God and the new way of communion with one another in the life and love of God was opened to us (1 John 1.1-3).

Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples for the sake of the world and preached the coming of God's kingdom now and still to come (John 17:21). He entrusted this message and ministry of unity and reconciliation to his disciples and through them to the Church that is called to continue his mission (2 Cor 5: 18-20). From the beginning the community of the baptized lived together, were devoted to the apostolic teaching and fellowship, breaking bread and praying together, caring for the needy and yet struggling with factions and divisions (Acts 2. 34).

The Church as a Body of Christ embodies Jesus' uniting, reconciling and self-sacrificial love on the cross. At the heart of God's own life of communion is forever a Cross and forever resurrection – a reality which is revealed to us and through us. God is always there ahead of us, always surprising us, transcending our failures and offering us the gift of new life.

## What we have learned on our journey together

**Christian unity, the unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation belong together. In God's plan they are inseparable. The Church is: foretaste of new creation; called to be sign to the whole world of the life God intends for all; and instrument spreading the good news of God's kingdom of justice, peace and love.**

As **foretaste** God gives to the Church gracious gifts: a faith; baptism in which we are in Christ and made a new creation; the Eucharist, the foretaste of the heavenly Banquet; a ministry to nurture the gifts of all the baptised. Ordered life too is gift helping us to live sacrificially, in justice and peace, and serving one another and the world. We are coming to understand that diversity is also a gift. It is creative and life-giving, yet it cannot be so great that the baptised become strangers and enemies to one another.<sup>1</sup>

As prophetic **sign** the Church's vocation is to show forth the life God wills for the whole creation. We are hardly a credible sign as long as our ecclesial divisions and hostilities remain. Divisions and marginalisation on the basis of ethnicity, gender, power, status, caste also obscure the Church's witness to unity. To be a credible sign our life together must reflect the qualities of patience, generosity, attentive listening to one another, mutual accountability, inclusivity, a willingness to stay together, not saying 'I have no need of you' (1 Cor 12:21). Only as Christians are renewed and inspired by God's Spirit will the Church bear authentic witness to the possibility of reconciled life for all people, for all creation. It is especially in its weakness and poverty, suffering as Christ suffers, that the Church is credible sign and mystery of God's grace.<sup>2</sup>

As **instrument** the Church is called to make present God's holy and life affirming plan for the world revealed in Jesus Christ. In its work of service, evangelism and mission done in Christ's way, the Church participates in offering God's life to the world. We are to challenge structures of injustice, work to

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<sup>1</sup> We pray that as our churches respond to the Faith and Order document, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, we may be helped to understand more of the visible unity God calls us to live in and for the world.

<sup>2</sup> We gratefully acknowledge the many programmes of the WCC that have helped us to understand what it means to be a faithful community where divisions of ethnicity, gender, power and status are being confronted and overcome.

overcome violence and promote peace. As we have stood together in situations of oppression, acted together to overcome violence and worked for just peace, we have understood more of Christ's ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us.<sup>3</sup>

### God's call to our generation

In our fellowship of churches, we have learned that we are called to pray, to witness and to work together for the visible unity of the Church, the unity of the human community and the unity of all creation. Our hearts are open to receive God's gift of unity and we long to make that visible in the world. Despite our human failings, we are never dismayed, but continually rejoice that the God of life goes on creating what is good. Having faith in God's creating and recreating power, we trust that the Church will indeed be foretaste, prophetic sign and effective instrument of the new life that God offers to the world. For it is in God, who beckons us to life in all its fullness and promise, that we find the source of our joy and the ground of our hopes for unity. Because of this, we pray, as Christ prayed, that we shall be one, for the sake of the world.

We ask one another:

Will we witness together to the God of life, that the whole creation may be sustained, honoured and renewed?

Will we work together for justice, peace and reconciliation?

Will we continue together, seeking the visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, determined, wherever possible, to live that unity now?

Will we pray together that the God of life, will lead us to justice and peace; in the Church, among all people, and in and for the whole created earth?

Through these things we will stay together, committed to "the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches...to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe."<sup>4</sup> We turn to God on whom we depend, to keep ever before us the pattern of faithfulness that is our discipleship in Christ.

O God of life,  
lead us to justice and peace,  
that the scarred world may find healing,  
divided churches become visibly one  
and suffering people find hope,  
through the one who prayed for us  
and in whom we are one body,  
your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit,  
lives and reigns, one God,  
now and forever, Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> We are thankful for all we have learned through the Decade to Overcome Violence about peace in God's way; and all we have learned about mission in God's way as we commemorated Edinburgh 1910 and have encapsulated in the CWME document, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*.

<sup>4</sup> *The Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches* as amended by the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006; III: Purposes and Functions.

