



An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (revised)

“We intend to move together. Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we challenge all people of good will to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions. This Assembly calls you to join us in pilgrimage. May the churches be communities of healing and compassion, and may we see the Good News so that justice will grow and God’s deep peace rest on the world.” – Message of the 10th Assembly

I. The invitation to move together

The World Council of Churches (WCC) 2013 Busan assembly invited Christians and people of good will everywhere to join in a pilgrimage of justice and peace. Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we call all people – young and old, women and men, differently abled, people of different faiths – to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions, together. We call first of all on the member churches and partners to walk together in a common quest, renewing our vocation of the church through collaborative engagement with the most important issues of justice and peace, healing a world filled with conflict, injustice and pain.

Participating in God’s gift of unity and God’s mission of justice and peace (*missio Dei*), we intend to respond to God’s will for this world by becoming communities of justice and peace and celebrating the fellowship of such communities.

II. Growing in fellowship – A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

The assembly unity statement underlined: “The unity of the Church, the unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation are interconnected. Christ who makes us one calls us to live in justice and peace and impels us to work together for justice and peace in God’s world.”

The message of the first WCC assembly in Amsterdam 1948 had expressed the commitment of the churches “to stay together”. Subsequent assemblies affirmed this commitment. Staying together, the churches were working together on theological statements and engaged in common mission and service with the hope that they would grow together towards the goal of visible unity.

Declaring “We intend to move together” and inviting all people of good will to “join in pilgrimage”, the delegates of the Busan assembly responded in a new way to the contemporary contextual challenges for the witness and very being of the churches, to the needs of people and creation yearning for justice and peace, and to the perceptions of many young people eager to see signs of hope.

The 10th Assembly helped us to see that we are already participating in a common journey. Our efforts for unity in our Christian faith are responses to God’s gift of life and God’s call to grow in fellowship. This fellowship is given through the faith and the baptism of the church; it is a spiritual gift. This unity in faith is also truly human, an expression of being created and blessed. It is manifested as a unity based on the core values of *koinonia* that establish and secure right relation: justice and peace.

Such a shift from a static to a more dynamic understanding of unity can be challenging. Different theological traditions and cultures understand and practice “pilgrimage” in different ways. Opting for the

name of “pilgrimage *of* justice and peace” and not “*towards* justice and peace” or “*for* justice and peace”, the Busan assembly began to address these questions. The word “pilgrimage” was chosen to convey that this is a journey with deep spiritual meaning and with profound theological connotations and implications. As a “pilgrimage *of* justice and peace”, it is neither a journey towards a concrete geographical place nor some simple form of activism. It is a transformative journey that God invites us to in anticipation of the final purpose for the world that the Triune God brings about. The movement of love which is essential to the Triune God manifests itself in the promise of justice and peace. They are signs of God’s reign to come which is already visible here and now wherever reconciliation and healing are seen.

Christians are to partake in these signs of God’s reign and to struggle for them in response to God’s will and promise. The pilgrimage of justice and peace is thus grounded in God’s own mission for the world and the example of Jesus. Following Jesus means meeting him wherever people suffer injustice, violence and war. To experience God’s presence with the most vulnerable, the wounded, and the marginalized is a transformative experience; Alive in the Spirit, Christians discover their deepest power and energy for the transformation of an unjust world, joining with other faith communities and all people of good will as companions on the way.

The search for Christian unity “so that the world may believe” and may embrace the unity of the whole cosmos as final goal of the eschatological promise of God’s reign, remain the main empowerment of the common journey of our ecumenical movement. Walking side by side with one another, we are inviting others to go with us for the healing and reconciliation of this suffering and conflict striven world.

III. Global and local contexts of the pilgrimage

The pilgrimage takes place in a world that cries out for engagement by Christians and all people of good will. Whether in the arenas of ecology, economy, peace, or human dignity, Christians find local and global affronts to the gospel values of justice and peace.

Ironically, while stunning breakthroughs probe new horizons in science, medicine, literacy, and commerce, the planet sits at the brink of disaster and life itself is imperiled. A stumbling global economy leaves millions of people idle and exacerbates inequality and poverty in both North and South. Churches around the world struggle to deal with the consequences. People in Africa and other continents watch their rich natural reserves being exported, while their own lives remain mired in poverty. Savage weather patterns and rising sea levels beat down whole communities, from the South Pacific to Europe and North America. In the midst of geopolitical shifts, widespread violence and war in and among nations and peoples disrupt the livelihoods of families in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Iraq, Africa and Asia, setting millions of people fleeing for refuge or migrating to more promising locales. Forced migration leaves the vulnerable subject to trafficking. Indeed, violence and mistreatment seem inordinately to affect women and girls, whose gifts are undervalued, whose bodies are often violated, and whose very education is often opposed. And, over all this, the lethal potential of nuclear weapons seems to risk the world itself in a game of chance.

As the churches face these larger realities, their own situations are changing in decisive ways. To an unprecedented extent, Christians interact daily with people of other faith traditions, perhaps in their own families. In their search for new forms of authentic discipleship, Christians everywhere evince a new interest in spirituality and spiritual traditions. Churches in the global South may experience extraordinary growth, while churches in Europe and North America may find their smaller, aging congregations augmented with new members from very different cultural roots. Although women continue to advance into leadership, gender inequality in the churches persists. Despite their growing number and important role in many societies the participation of young people also remains often insufficient or just a token. As denominational markers fade in many places, churches are exploring new ways of engaging in preaching and prayer, searching for new expressions of how we can witness together as church and for new leaders with the education and discernment to guide the people of God in this new day.

The ecumenical movement, too, has adjusted to a new era of diversity and challenge. The movement is strongly alert to the spiritual dimension of the search for unity. It is redefining mission and service. It both affirms and works with the deep diversity of Christian communities, even as it reaches out in dialogue and collaboration with other religious traditions. Above all, it seeks to nurture the fellowship, coordinate advocacy and encourage the solidarity of Christians and Christian churches everywhere.

Moving together, churches, ecumenical partners and others can build on the results of the Ecumenical Conversations at the assembly and on important background documents such as

- *The Church –Towards a Common Vision,*
- *Mission towards Life,*
- *Economy of Life*
- *A Call to Just Peace.*

Their impulses culminated in both the *Unity Statement* of the assembly and the *call to join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* of the assembly message.

IV. Participating in the Pilgrimage

Pilgrims on their way are moving - lightly as they learn that only the essential and necessary counts. They are open for surprises and ready to be transformed by encounters and challenges on the way. Everyone who will walk with us with an open heart and mind will be a welcome com-pan-ion (“the ones we share our bread with”) on the way. The pilgrimage promises to be a transformative journey, discovering ourselves anew in new relationships of justice and peace.

Where do we see God calling and working for justice and peace and the unity of the churches and all humankind? Participating in the pilgrimage of justice and peace will involve individuals, parishes, communities on local, regional, and international levels re-visiting the greatest needs in their particular contexts, reflecting on those needs in light of the gospel values, and being inspired to act in concert with others.

The pilgrimage might consist of at least three different **dimensions** – not in a linear but much more in a dynamic, interdependent understanding:

- **Celebrating the Gifts (*via positiva*)**
We do not journey with empty hands, nor do we walk alone. The “original blessing” of being created in the image of God and together – as a fellowship – we are a unique part of the wider web of life, which amazes us. Together we celebrate God’s great gift of life, the beauty of creation and the unity of a reconciled diversity. We feel empowered by this grace of participating in God’s movement of love, justice and peace. – We receive in prayer.
- **Visiting the Wounds (*via negativa*)**
This pilgrimage will lead us to the locations of ugly violence and injustices. We intend to look for God’s incarnated presence in the midst of suffering, exclusion, and discrimination. The true encounter with real, contextual experiences of a broken creation and sinful behaviour against each other might inform us anew about the essence of life itself. It might lead us to repentance and – in a movement of purification – liberate us from obsession with power, possessions, ego, and violence, so that we become ever more Christ-like. – We listen in prayer.
- **Transforming the Injustices (*via transformativa*)**
Being transformed ourselves, the pilgrimage may lead us to concrete actions of transformation. We may grow in our courage to live in true compassion with one another and with nature. This will include the strength to resist evil – injustice and violence, even if a church finds itself in a minority situation. Economic and ecological justice as well as the healing of the wounded and the striving for peaceful reconciliation is our call – in each and every context. The credibility of our actions might grow

from the quality of the fellowship we share – a fellowship *of* justice and peace. – We are transformed through prayer and act in prayer.

We believe that the Lord's Prayer will help, guide, and lead us on our common journey.

V. The Role of the WCC in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Concentrating on the fellowship of churches and its convening, coordinating and enabling, and leading role, the WCC is committed to “setting the table” for the churches as well as other organizations and communities including the Christian world communions, specialized ministries, interfaith organizations and social movements to share spirituality and practice developed in their search for transformation for justice, peace and sustainability.

In addition to encouraging and facilitating the involvement of member churches and ecumenical partners in the pilgrimage, the WCC also needs to participate in the pilgrimage itself. The pilgrimage of justice and peace is both at the centre and at the heart of the strategic planning of the WCC together with churches and partners in order to renew and to strengthen our Unity in diversity, our participation in God's Mission, our Ecumenical Formation as well as our Public Witness of Just Peace.

The overall objectives of the Council for the coming period reflect basic dimensions of a pilgrimage for justice and peace. These are:

- ***Strengthening the fellowship:*** while walking and working together in the pilgrimage member churches and ecumenical partners experience the gift of unity;
- ***Witnessing together:*** while moving together churches and ecumenical partners are able to advocate together for justice and peace;
- ***Encouraging spirituality, reflection and formation:*** while witnessing together the fellowship is strengthened through building spirituality;
- ***Building trust and understanding:*** while working together for justice and peace, partnering with all ‘people of good will’ is needed;
- ***Inspiring and innovative communication:*** while journeying, witnessing, learning, and partnering, inspiring and innovative communication is needed to become visibly effective.

These overall objectives of the Council's engagement in the pilgrimage of justice and peace express themselves through its programmatic work. As a seven-year programme emphasis, the pilgrimage of justice and peace will combine community-based initiatives and national and international advocacy for **Just Peace**, focusing on

- life-affirming economies
- climate change
- nonviolent peace-building and reconciliation
- human dignity

with on-going analysis, study and reflection on what it means to be on a pilgrimage of justice and peace for the churches in today's world.

A process of theological reflection on the pilgrimage together with work done by the Commission on Faith and Order, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs and all programmatic work of the WCC must be central to the pilgrimage. Unity, mission and service of the churches and partners are held together and brought into dynamic interaction through participation in the pilgrimage.

To ensure a transparent and participatory process, the WCC will:

- Cooperate closely with churches and ecumenical partners in developing action and reflection in the framework of the pilgrimage and fostering sharing of contributions and resources;
- Facilitate reflections on the pilgrimage and the steps to be taken regularly in all commissions and consultative bodies;
- Establish a reference group with experts on different dimensions of the pilgrimage and representatives of relevant governing and consultative bodies and ecumenical partners. This reference group will be a flexible instrument whose composition will be changed with shifting points of emphasis and priorities.
- During each of the central committee meetings, significant time will be given to the monitoring of the pilgrimage by the programme committee and for discussion of urgent concerns in the context of the pilgrimage.

VI. Churches in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Churches together and with their ecumenical partners, both in their own context and cooperating internationally, will be the main actors of the pilgrimage. Still, this pilgrimage is an invitation as well as an opportunity for individuals, parishes, and communities to participate in the movement of justice and peace. This process of **transformation** will include experience, sharing, listening, praying, penance, witnessing, awareness-building, reflecting and acting.

The following questions may help you to prepare for the pilgrimage in your own family, local church or community, together in ecumenical fellowship:

- What is the promise of a pilgrimage understood biblically?
- What is your understanding of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in your context?
- What is the promise of a Pilgrimage?
- Who are the ones you want to journey with?

- What are your experiences of the gift of life, the gift of creation? How do you celebrate that?

- What are the wounds in your context?
- How do you intend to visit the wounds of the other and of the natural environment?
- What kind of transformation do you experience?
- What will be your focus?

- What are realistic possibilities of transforming injustice and violence?
- What are the proposed actions you are willing to take in your context?

In the end, we are invited by God to join this divine journey with joy, humility, courage and commitment, praying:

We are a fellowship on the move, a community of pilgrims. We journey together towards life in all its fullness. We pray for God's guidance and inspiration, so that our pilgrimage will open us to one another through dynamic and creative interaction for justice. God of life, lead us to be living instruments of your justice and peace!

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