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# SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT

Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Justice  
and Peace in Europe

Matthew Ross  
Jin Yang Kim (Editors)



# **Seek Peace and Pursue It**

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## SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT

Matthew Ross and Jin Yang Kim

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## Foreword from the Acting General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

In John 10:10, we read the words of Jesus: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” This message of life in abundance is at the heart of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace emerged from the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2013. It has been the overarching theme of the work of the World Council of Churches in the years following. This publication shows some of the activities that have taken place in Europe, which have inspired churches and many individuals in a quest for solidarity, justice, and peace.

Following the foundation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, a key issue for the fellowship was the refugee crisis in Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. The Cold War years, the violent break-up of former Yugoslavia and “the Troubles” in Northern Ireland have shown the urgency of Christ’s message of justice and peace.

The tragic war in Ukraine is a cause for deep upset and concern within the fellowship of the World Council of Churches. War inevitably has a terrible cost in human lives, and this is being seen on a daily basis. Millions have become refugees. The inability to harvest and export Ukrainian wheat may have catastrophic consequences for millions of people in some of the world’s poorest countries. War is never the answer to disagreements between nations. We urge an immediate end to this war and a diplomatic settlement.

The danger of escalation of any war to the use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons is a horrible reality, which shows the need to eliminate such threats. New technology has the potential to create new perils, such as autonomous weapons systems (sometimes described as “killer robots”). The World Council of Churches supports the campaign to ban such weaponry in international law.

Despite the situation in Ukraine, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Europe has continued and showed its value. In fact, it has become even more urgent and relevant. It shows just how important justice and peace really are for human flourishing. Christ's message of life in abundance is vital.

The Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca  
Acting General Secretary  
World Council of Churches

## Foreword from the General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches

The Church, as the new creation in Christ, brings to the world the ministry of reconciliation (2. Cor. 5:17-21) in its life of ceaseless prayer, witness, service, and the experience of fellowship. Reconciliation and peace are not private and individualistic pursuits. The witness to and practice of peace is public, and reconciliation involves the mending of broken relationships and the transformation of social structures. Reconciliation can only be achieved with justice and truth-telling that lead to repentance and forgiveness, and eventually the healing of memories. As part of the new creation, members of the Church are called to transform injustice and violence and pursue peace, walking together with others who affirm the fullness of life of every living creature.

Since 2014 and the launch of the World Council of Churches' Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, churches in Europe have joined the study and reflection on what it means to be on a pilgrimage of justice and peace in an increasingly secular and plural society. While taking responsibility for past conflicts and engaging with other civil society stakeholders, grassroots and civil society movements, policymakers, academia, and other faith communities, churches in Europe have engaged in peace, social, and climate justice initiatives. The Conference of European Churches' contribution to the Pilgrimage has especially sought to highlight and support a common voice of European churches engaged in questions of climate emergency and sustainability.

The latest resurgence of conflict on European soil, such as the resurfacing of old disputes in Northern Ireland due to Brexit, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the more recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, have demonstrated the fragility of peace in our continent and the continuous need for churches in Europe to work on justice and peace. The response of churches in Europe is not one of mere condemnation. They actively work for justice and peace, and concrete examples of reconciliation, some of which are presented in the current publication, have shown that there are alternatives to violence and conflict. The Pilgrimage has been a strong expression of togetherness for several churches. It has shown how the public witness of Christian imperatives can transcend advocacy and strengthen the bonds of solidarity and church

fellowship. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, therefore, is still relevant in pointing to a new direction for living and praxis based on 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17).

Reconciliation and peace acquire new meaning in light of the current global realities. Christ did not call us to be the establishment but to proclaim the hope of reconciliation and unity of the whole world in Christ. As the salt of the earth and the yeast of the bread, churches and Christians are called to translate God's love into word and action by witnessing to Christ's compelling love (2 Cor. 5:14) and sharing in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). In this regard, churches in Europe continue to play a crucial role in engaging with plural and increasingly secular societies, promoting peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen  
General Secretary  
Conference of European Churches

## Introduction

The World Council of Churches (WCC) assembly in Busan in 2013 called on churches everywhere to walk together, to view their common life, their journey of faith, as a part of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, and to join others in celebrating life and in concrete steps toward transforming injustices and violence. WCC member churches, other Christians, people of other faiths, and people of good will were invited to walk, work, and pray together. The WCC Central Committee meeting of 2014 further clarified the pilgrimage:

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.

Through this document, it became clear that being on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace includes: participating in God’s mission towards life; moving to issues and places relevant for life and survival of people and the earth; deepening the fellowship of churches on the way with a strong spiritual dimension of common prayer and theological reflection; participating in a journey of hope; looking for and celebrating signs of God’s reign of justice and peace already here and now; and discovering opportunities for common witness and transformative action that make a difference in today’s world with an open invitation to all people of good will.

The WCC Central Committee also recommended that, in our approach to the pilgrimage, we should work with at least three different dimensions—not in a linear fashion, but with dynamic, interdependent understanding: celebrating the gifts (*via positiva*); visiting the wounds (*via negativa*); and transforming the injustices (*via transformativa*). They also recommended that “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 peacebuilding and reconciliation, and human dignity.”<sup>1</sup>

As the different regions and churches engage with the themes, they should do so within their context, raising issues that are pertinent to them. Within the framework of the pilgrimage, in 2016, the Central Committee introduced the Pilgrim Team Visits as one methodology to show solidarity with one another. It was through analysis of the Pilgrim Team Visits by the Reference Group on Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and the Theological Study Group that new but related themes began to emerge. These lived experiences of the people visited are summarized in four themes: truth and trauma, land and development, gender justice, and racial justice.

## **The European Context**

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is intended to be an expression of international solidarity with people, particularly those in difficult circumstances.

The Rev. Dr Susan Durber writes: “It is vital that the pilgrimage includes team visits to European communities. Europeans need to be vulnerable and open to practice hospitality. The joy of the pilgrimage is that it really is aiming to be rooted in mutual accompaniment—and that means no white saviours, no recreation of colonial obligations and expectations, no collusion with present power and economic imbalances.”<sup>2</sup>

This publication looks at work done directly within the context of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Europe, as well as justice and peace issues promoted by churches that complement the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace agenda. Each year, the pilgrimage has included a focus on different regions of the world. There was a regional focus on Europe in 2015, including Pilgrim Team Visits as part of the pilgrimage experience (such as one to Ireland in December 2015). The postponement of the 11th Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe from 2021 to 2022 due to COVID-19 allowed for an additional focus on Europe in 2022.

Section 1 provides an overview of Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace events in Europe, particularly during the focus on Europe in 2015. It also introduces the events planned for 2022. It is not intended to be a comprehensive report on each event; rather, it offers reflections on some of the ways in which churches

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1. *Invitation to the Pilgrimage*, sections IV, V.

2. From chapter 1.8 in this volume.

and ecumenical organizations were challenged and inspired. Likewise, this is not an evaluation of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace but an opportunity to share stories and insights about the pilgrimage in Europe, including four contributions from members of the WCC's Reference Group on Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and/or the Theological Study Group—all of whom have had extensive experience with the pilgrimage.

Section 2 contains essays on issues of justice and peace in Europe from individuals working with churches and ecumenical partners across Europe, such as Interdiac and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. These highlights the context of the work and mission of the churches but do not necessarily represent official parts of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. Likewise, these contributions from individuals do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the World Council of Churches or its members but are intended to stimulate debate, interest, and international comparison.

The Appendix includes additional resources, including statements from the WCC such as on the centenary of the Armenian Genocide and the situation in Ukraine in 2022. The WCC denounces any and every use of deadly armed force to resolve disputes that could be resolved by dialogue. This section includes copies of statements issued by the WCC in response to the situation in Ukraine between January and March 2022.



**Section 1**

**Reflecting on the Pilgrimage of Justice  
and Peace in Europe**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

—John 14:27



## Introduction to the Section

In 2014, in its first meeting since the assembly in Busan, the WCC Central Committee proposed the following: “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, [and] 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.”<sup>1</sup>

Each year since 2015, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has focused on a region and theme as shown below:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Theme</b>
2015	Europe	Climate change (COP 21)
2016	Middle East	Peace-building in the context of religion and violence
2017	Africa	Peace-building in the context of religion and violence
2018	Latin America/ Caribbean	Ecumenical diakonia and sustainable development
2019	Asia	Racism
2020	Pacific	Caring for people, water, and land
2021	North America	Indigenous peoples and racism
2022	Europe	Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity (the theme of the 11th assembly of the WCC)

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1. *An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* (revised), WCC Central Committee 2–8 July 2014, Geneva, Switzerland, sec. V, para. 4, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>.

Although Europe was named specifically in 2015 and 2022, the pilgrimage did not exclude European initiatives in other years. The effort is intended to be global, and many activities on other continents have a direct impact on Europe. In 2021, online regional meetings were held to respond to the challenge of COVID-19 in a context of justice and peace. Some events scheduled for 2022 will have taken place after the publication of this document. Closely related to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is the concept of the Pilgrim Team Visits, in which individuals were able to learn first-hand from visits. The global dimension of the Pilgrim Team Visits is highlighted in the report of Maria Mountraki, a member of the Orthodox Church of Finland, who took part in a visit to Colombia.

The concept of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace took time to develop. 2015 was the first year of the regional focus, and so was innovative and not influenced by other regional programmes. Whilst some at the assembly in Busan quickly grasped the vision of the programme, comprehension took longer for others. It is clear that churches in some European countries embraced the concept more fully than others—most notably in Germany. Some local events were also identified with the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, even if not as part of a wider programme. This showed a willingness to participate in a global concept, as well as demonstrating that the pilgrimage was not intended to be imposed from the top down.

The Conference of European Churches actively participated in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. This included involvement from the European Churches Environmental Network (ECEN).<sup>2</sup> There were a series of European church events leading to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris in December 2015. A key event organized by the Conference of European Churches was the consultation “A European Contribution to the Pilgrimage for Climate Justice,” which took place at the Evangelical Academy of Villigst in Schwerte, Germany, from 12–14 October 2015.

On 6 May 2021, an online European regional consultation addressed the challenge of COVID-19 and reflected on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

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2. Conference of European Churches, “European contribution to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,” news release, 7 September 2015, section 5, <https://www.ceceurope.org/european-contribution-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace/>.

in the European context.<sup>3</sup> This was an opportunity to reflect theologically, and to engage with experts, local community organizations, and advocates for justice and peace. The COVID-19 pandemic has not just revealed injustice, economic inequality, and marginalization; it has also changed the way we conduct ministry and mission. The consultation enabled participants to share their experiences of how churches across the continent are living out their commitment to the pilgrimage in the context of COVID-19, focusing on:

- Disproportionate impact on Black and minority ethnic communities?
- Impact on people with disabilities
- Health and anti-vaccine propaganda
- Long-term consequences on young people and mental health
- Impact on children
- COVID-19 as a disease of the poor and its social/economic impacts
- Poverty

War, poverty, and persecution are major issues for justice and peace. With Europe having once seen considerable emigration to countries such as the USA and Australia, recent decades have seen considerable migration into Europe. The situation in Ukraine in 2022 has caused the first major movement of refugees within Europe since the aftermath of the Second World War. Refugees from the war in Syria, as well as migrants fleeing poverty and persecution in some countries in Africa and Asia (most notably Eritrea and Afghanistan) have sought refuge in many countries in Europe and the Middle East (most notably Germany, Sweden, Turkey, and Lebanon). Reactions to migration have ranged from hospitality to hostility. Churches can play a key role in emphasizing our common humanity and the biblical imperative to welcome the stranger. This stance is exemplified by the work of the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and several diaconal agencies.<sup>4</sup>

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3. “Challenges Faced by European Churches and Society During the Pandemic: Where Does this Lead Us?,” regional consultation on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, World Council of Churches and Conference of European Churches, 6 May 2021, <https://www.oikoumene.org/regional-consultations-pjp-2021-europe> and <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/a-tangle-of-covid-19-challenges-for-european-churches-and-society-how-do-we-begin-to-unknot-them>.

4. For more information on the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), see the website of the organization at [www.ccme.be](http://www.ccme.be).

Gender justice, racial justice, and social justice are matters of justice and peace.<sup>5</sup> Whilst laws on gender equality throughout Europe have developed considerably in recent decades, social attitudes have sometimes lagged. The WCC works to defend human dignity by addressing human rights from an ethical and theological perspective. Building just communities of women and men became a priority of the WCC in response to the call from the 10th assembly in 2013.<sup>6</sup> The Thursdays in Black Campaign to address violence against women and girls has been enthusiastically supported by many churches in Europe and beyond, but sadly, the work to change behaviour is far from complete.<sup>7</sup> The Bible challenges us against complacency: “They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, when there is no peace’ (Jer. 8:11).

The 11th Assembly of the WCC, scheduled for 2021, was postponed to 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This allowed for the continuation of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in 2022, with a decision taken to again focus on Europe because the assembly is to be held in Karlsruhe, Germany. Events for 2022, including Pilgrim Team Visits of approximately 3–4 days, were originally scheduled to be completed before the assembly. The locations and themes of these Pilgrim Team Visits were as follows:

- Armenia: post-war trauma and diaconal work (in the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war with Azerbaijan)
- Balkan region: gender justice and recovery from trauma (postponed until after the assembly)
- Ukraine and Belarus: diaconal work and women’s involvement in peacebuilding (postponed)
- Italy: migration and refugees
- Hamburg, Germany: assembly pre-consultation
- Berlin, Germany: Africans and the Africans in the diaspora; remembrance of the Partition of Africa (postponed)
- Sámi indigenous peoples in Norway, Sweden, and Finland: climate justice

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5. The issue of racism is addressed in chapter 2.1.

6. See “Just Community of Women and Men,” World Council of Churches, accessed 12 April 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/just-community-of-women-and-men>.

7. See “Thursdays in Black,” World Council of Churches, accessed 12 April 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/thursdays-in-black>.

The plans for Pilgrim Team Visits to Ukraine and Belarus in early 2022 had to be postponed, but several senior staff members from the WCC and ACT Alliance visited Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine to gain first-hand insight into the plight of refugees fleeing Ukraine and the humanitarian response by churches, diaconal agencies, and others. The response of the WCC to the situation in Ukraine between January and March 2022 is outlined in the Appendix.

This book does not and cannot evaluate the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace as a whole. An evaluation will need to consider a host of questions. Which of the proposed topics did the churches actually take up? How did they deal with the methodology, if at all? What priorities did the churches set? Were ecumenical partners invited to participate? Which secular partners participated and how? How successful were they, and how can this be measured and recognized? What obstacles and failures appeared along the way? Since 2020, the Rev. Margarithe Veen has been the chairperson of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace working group of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands. She comments that it is hard to ascertain the success of the pilgrimage in Europe:

As it is always difficult to touch the dimension of transformation. I would say, it would be important to share stories of the various pilgrims in Europe at the 11th Assembly. Meanwhile, it would be valuable to face the wounds of injustice and violence in Europe. This, in relation to our faith that the wounds are not the beginning, God's blessing for our live in the light of justice and peace is. And that that will give the strength to face a dimension of transformation by kneeling down at the injustice and violence, to find a way to stand up together. As Martin Luther King once said: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Hopefully, the 11th WCC Assembly can bring pilgrims together to find each other on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in the various dimensions to share God's blessings and the Peace of Jesus Christ. Maybe, that will be the impact of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the Pilgrimage as an ongoing call and prayer for our lives for unity and a just peace in today's world.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Report from the Rev. Margarithe Veen to the Rev. Matthew Ross, WCC Programme Executive, in correspondence, March 2022.



## 1.1

# Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace\*

Dagmar Heller

When the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) invited “member churches and ecumenical partners to commit to working together as a fellowship in ‘A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,’”<sup>1</sup> it was clear that this does not mean a new programme or project, but rather is an overall idea for the work of WCC in general—an idea whose impact, structure, and realization still need to be unpacked and developed. In the following contribution, I will share some first reflections that might help to understand the metaphor of pilgrimage as such, the specific implications of a pilgrimage for justice and peace, and its potential for the ecumenical movement.

### What Is a Pilgrimage?

The idea of pilgrimage is an old one and is not exclusive to Christianity. When considering the phenomenon of pilgrimage in different religions (including Christianity), researchers distinguish different types of pilgrimage.<sup>2</sup>

First, pilgrimage is made to a given place to commemorate a person (a saint, a martyr) or an event. Such a pilgrimage includes returning home. This is the pilgrimage as we know it in Islam (Mekka), but also in the Christian tradition, from the Middle Ages until today in the Roman Catholic Church—pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela, to Jerusalem, and to other places. The purpose of this type of pilgrimage is to come closer to holy people and thus closer to God; sometimes it involves the idea of being physically healed ( Lourdes). It often is related to aspects of repentance and penitence. And sometimes the motivation for such pilgrimage is to give thanks to God (or a saint) for being healed.

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\* This chapter originally appeared as an article in *The Ecumenical Review* 66, no. 2 (July 2014): 135–38, and is reproduced with permission. This footnote should be marked with a star and not numbered.

1. Recommendation of the Programme Guidelines Committee, 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC, Busan, Republic of Korea.

2. See Bernhard Kötting, *Peregrinatio Religiosa: Wallfahrten in der Antike und das Pilgerwesen der alten Kirche* [Pilgrimages in Antiquity and Pilgrimages in the Old Church] (Münster, 1950). DOI: 10.1111/erev.12090.

But there is another type of pilgrimage that is different from the first in the sense in that it does not necessarily include a return home. This pilgrimage is known in history through, for example, the Irish and Scottish itinerant monks, who evangelized parts of Germany and Switzerland. This type of pilgrimage is not meant to commemorate a person or thing; its purpose is rather a radical way of following Christ. In this it has two major aspects: it has a missionary aspect, namely, to bring the gospel into the world; but it sometimes also has a personal aspect, namely, to undergo personal change. The aspect of *metanoia*, of repentance, plays a role in both types of pilgrimage.

This second type of pilgrimage has, in a specific way, biblical roots: I am thinking of Abraham, who was called to leave his home and go to where God would lead him. I am also thinking of the “pilgrimage” of the people of Israel in the desert. And finally, Jesus himself was a “pilgrim” in the sense that he did not have a house or a fixed place to live.

### **What Do We Gain from This Idea of Pilgrimage?**

From these reflections on pilgrimage in general I would like to highlight several aspects that are interesting to consider when we reflect further on the ecumenical movement:

- Pilgrimage means to move, it indicates movement and thus it means change.
- Pilgrimage means to go into unknown land, and thus to take risks.
- Pilgrimage means to be dependent on others, to give up certainty and power.
- Therefore often a pilgrimage is undertaken in a group and is in this way related to community and communion.
- Pilgrimage is related to spirituality in two ways: it is an element of spirituality, but it is also based on a spiritual life in prayer and meditation.
- Pilgrimage is related to repentance—and here I am not talking about penitence in the sense of punishment, but in the sense of *metanoia*, of one’s own inner change.
- Pilgrimage is related to giving thanks.

## Pilgrimage and the WCC

Why is it interesting to use the image of pilgrimage for the work in the WCC and in the ecumenical movement? And why is it interesting to explore the idea of pilgrimage for this work at this moment in time?

In particular, Protestants may think: The idea of pilgrimage communicates something specific to Orthodox or Roman Catholics. But if one thinks of the abuse of pilgrimages in the Middle Ages, which were part of Martin Luther's critique of the Roman Church, pilgrimage does not seem a very attractive idea. On the other hand, in theological literature and in WCC documents, the image of pilgrimage has already often been used to describe the way the churches are walking together in the ecumenical movement. (It is not by chance that the chapel of the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva is designed as it is: It symbolizes a Bedouin's tent, behind which lies the idea of the people of God journeying together.)

Thus, the idea of pilgrimage is not new, and the churches have already been on the way since 1948—or even earlier. So, the question arises: Why is the WCC taking up this idea anew right now, at this moment on the way?

I see several reasons, and good reasons:

First, the idea of pilgrimage—as I said—highlights “movement.” The assembly in Busan stated, “We intend to move together.” This is a change from Amsterdam (1948) and Harare (1998), where the churches stated, “We intend to stay together.” A pilgrimage always needs both: staying and moving, rest and labour. Over the last few years, we have often heard the word “stagnation” used as a characteristic of the ecumenical movement. And we can indeed observe stagnation in different ways in the last decade, which I cannot point out here in detail. It seems that in Busan the churches realized: It is time now to move, and it is necessary to be intentional about this move.

Second, to move here means to reflect anew on the essential elements of the pilgrimage and to re-discover them:

- There is the element of communion: the churches need to re-discover that they are TOGETHER on the way and what this means. Where can the churches express and live their community?
- There is the element of spirituality: the churches need to re-discover that pilgrimage includes praying for each other and includes praying together. Do they really pray for each other? Do they pray

together? In what way or ways can they do this?

- And there is the element of repentance, of metanoia: the churches need to re-discover that to search for unity does not mean to impose one's own idea of unity on the others. Rather it means to re-discover that to come closer to the unity that God wants, they need to change, to repent, to see their own mistakes (and not only those of the others!).

## Why a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace?

So far, I have not spoken about another element in the call from Busan. It is—as we know—not just a call for a pilgrimage: it is a call for a “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.”

This is very specific to this pilgrimage. Normally a pilgrimage does not have such a specification. If it is a pilgrimage of the first type, it is a pilgrimage *to* a place. If it is the second type, it is without specification. But we must consider that the Christian way of pilgrimage, when compared with other religions, is specific. We see this especially in the second type: the pilgrimage for the sake of bringing the gospel into the world. And here it needs to be noted that justice and peace are the core of the gospel.

In light of this it is important to be aware of the fact that the assembly is *not* talking about a pilgrimage “to” or “toward” justice and peace. This would be a pilgrimage of the first type, where justice and peace would be the goal. But justice and peace are not the goals.

It is also not a pilgrimage *for* justice and peace. It is a pilgrimage *of* justice and peace. This use of the grammatical genitive indicates that “justice and peace” is the practical motive for the pilgrimage. Justice and peace are not a goal that we will reach at some stage in the future: rather, they are the message that the churches bring to the world on their pilgrimage—like the itinerant monks. The idea thus is not only that the pilgrims preach justice and peace but that they *live* it, showing the world that justice and peace is possible.

Much more has to be said about this. I have discovered that the idea has great potential for the ecumenical movement. And I have also discovered that the idea is being taken up. People in the churches already have ideas about how to give shape to this pilgrimage. It is becoming clear that this pilgrimage is not just something organized by Geneva from above. The churches are already on this pilgrimage, and whether the pilgrims move depends on the churches and on how they take up the call. In this sense, I think it is important

for the WCC offices in Geneva to undertake the following:

- to see in which direction the churches move
- to motivate other churches also to move
- to correct the movement here and there
- to make sure that the slow ones are not lost on the way
- to help the churches pray together
- and to help them sustain their motivation



## 1.2

# Churches Campaigning for Environmental Justice and Peace

Matthew Ross

Climate change was the core theme of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in 2015, in preparation for the COP21 (Conference of the Parties) United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Paris. Following calls for climate justice by religious leaders such as Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church, the WCC planned to bring strong voices from religious communities demanding a fair, ambitious, and legally binding treaty in Paris in 2015. This included voices from other continents, notably Africa and the Pacific, as well as from Europe. Local churches were also present, enthused, campaigning, coordinating local activities, and offering hospitality to visitors.

There have been several ecumenical pilgrimages for climate justice. The first was the 2015 “Get up and go!” pilgrimage from Flensburg to Paris for COP21. In September of that year, more than 60 delegates representing partner churches of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in northern Germany gathered for a consultation at Brecklum, Germany, on issues of global justice. The pilgrimage from Flensburg to Paris was supported by a broad ecumenical alliance of German regional Evangelical churches, Roman Catholic dioceses, associations, and development agencies, including Bread for the World and Misereor.

Other ecumenical pilgrimages for climate justice have taken place in connection with UN conferences on climate change, including one from Bonn (the site of COP23) via Berlin to Katowice, for COP24. COP26 was held in Glasgow, Scotland, in November 2021, and was also preceded by an ecumenical pilgrimage for climate justice. This pilgrimage started in Poland, proceeded through Germany and the Netherlands, and journeyed by ferry to Newcastle, England, before arriving in Scotland. People of faith were very visible in Glasgow during COP26, including delegations from churches and ecumenical organizations, such as the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches,

and the Pacific Conference of Churches. The ecumenical organization Glasgow Churches Together coordinated local church activities, including an ecumenical service in Glasgow Cathedral. Glasgow Churches Together also collaborated with groups to create the Homestay Network, which offered accommodation in individual homes to participants otherwise excluded by high prices charged by many hotels. This was a practical example of collaboration between faith-based and secular campaigners.

Some representatives of faith-based organizations were able to be inside the Blue Zone of COP26, where the negotiations were held. Demands were made for climate justice and a just transition. At the start of COP26, participants representing faith communities met in an interfaith dialogue and delivered a call to the secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change: “As people of faith, we believe that we humans are called to take care of our neighbours and of the Earth. We together envision a planet that secures good health, dignified livelihoods, and a future for all living beings including coming generations. Though we represent diverse faith traditions, we are united in calling upon the COP26 to act now on the climate emergency before it is too late.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. As quoted by Henrik Grape, in “The First Week after COP26—a Short Reflection,” World Council of Churches (blog), 22 November 2021, <https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/the-first-week-after-cop26-a-short-reflection>. For more information on COP26 and ecumenical work on climate change, see “Care for Creation and Climate Justice,” World Council of Churches, accessed 12 April 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/care-for-creation-and-climate-justice#cop26>.

## 1.3

### The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: Experience and Commitment of Churches in Europe

Peter Pavlovic

#### **How Much Is Europe Ready to Invest in Its Vision of Justice and Peace?**

The call for peace has long been a platitude in Europe. For most of the 20th century, much of the continent has benefitted from long decades without war. Throughout the second half of the 20th and early part of the 21st centuries, Europe has been viewed as the continent of peace—notwithstanding the experience in the Balkans in the 1990s and the local disruption of peace in some other regions of the continent. A significant component of this development has been the creation and continued development of the European Union (EU)—the major project in the European territory in the latter part of the 20th century. The construction of the EU started soon after WWII as an endeavour aiming toward peace and reconciliation. Peace and mutual respect have been identified by the founders of the EU as its main goals, with economic cooperation the chief instrument allowing for their effective pursuit.

The existence of the EU offers an opportunity to see peace in a broader context, intrinsically related to the process leading to it. For the founders, it was clear: the achievement of peace has first to build trust by establishing links of mutual respect and growing cooperation on common grounds. The four basic freedoms outlined as operational fundamentals of the EU—freedom of movement of people, services, good, and capital—offered the basic conceptual framework for pursuing that aim. The success of the project and decades of harm-free progress led to gradual lessening of attention to these cornerstones of the construction. The obscuring of these key principles, particularly the bond between justice and peace, led to gradual exchange of the principle of just peace for that of wealth and prosperity. In enjoying the benefits of peace, we have slowly fallen into the trap of considering peace as obvious and intrinsic; as something given to us as the gift of the past, and not necessarily requiring continuing effort.

The younger generations especially, with no recollection of war in Europe, have regarded the idea of the EU as a peace project with considerable doubt, asking, “What does this have to do with our reality? Why are we tainting the present with horrible memories of the past at the same time that we outline a beautiful future of prosperity?” Tragic developments in recent days in Ukraine remind us how wrong we have been. Peace is much more fragile than many of us living in Europe believed. Efforts for peace, if they are to be successful, have to be constant. Peace is not a given, it has to be earned through constant work, through the ceaseless struggle in identifying paths leading to it—paths which are many times obscured by changing realities. Peace has to be supported by sticking to principles that are inseparable from true peace: freedom and justice, without compromise.

It has been important for churches to present their witness in society and engage in the dialogue on the future of Europe since the inception of the European project. It has been important for them to publicly demonstrate commitment to the indivisibility of peace from the freedom of the individual and the pursuit of justice. In 2016, in response to the growing challenges on the continent, the Conference of European Churches (CEC) has included an extended process of consultations entitled “What Future for Europe?” The consultation has included a series of national and regional events in different parts of the continent for over two years. In the letter initiating the consultation, the following was underlined:

In evaluating the current challenges people in Europe have to face, in the spirit of the Charta Oecumenica and responding to the call to a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace of the World Council of Churches, the governing board of CEC:

. . . Reaffirms its understanding of the EU as a community of values pursuing human dignity, peace, reconciliation, justice, the rule of law, democracy, the respect for human rights, solidarity and sustainability

Encourages CEC Member Churches and all Christians in Europe to step up efforts in making such Christian virtues as respect for others, solidarity, diaconia and building up a community more visible in public life

Calls churches in Europe to an intensive discussion on the future of our continent, the role of the European Union and our vision of shared values.<sup>1</sup>

The consultation culminated in the CEC General Assembly 2018 in Novi Sad. The consultation put forward three key points: the building of community, offering service, and witnessing in society. Those, together, shape the churches' wish for a future in Europe and their contribution to it. The consultation process made clear that in the churches' view, the European Union is, in the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "a project based on solidarity, freedom, justice and peace, it is not an economic association operating on the basis of the principle that the economy is a law unto itself."<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the consultation process made clear that there is a need for an open and engaged exchange with participation from those in politics, economics, science, academia, and civil society. Churches, religions, and faith communities may have insights that would make such a consultation effective. As Archbishop Anders Wejryd of the Church of Sweden underlined in one of the contributions to the consultation: "Europe needs deep personal and vivid talks about what values do we want to lift up." He simultaneously raised the question: "What changes of priorities are we ready to make in order to honour these values and wishes?"<sup>3</sup> Moreover, ecumenical cooperation constitutes a constructive contribution to the building of a Europe of peace and mutual respect. To quote Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby in another strong contribution to the consultation: "The Church's presence and witness must be more powerful in its unity than the centrifugal forces within Europe are powerful in their fractures."<sup>4</sup>

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1. "What Future for Europe? Reaffirming the European Project as Building a Community of Values: An Open Letter of CEC to Churches and Partner Organisations in Europe and an Invitation to Dialogue and Consultation," Conference of European Churches, 8–10 June 2016, 13–14. This consultation, conducted from 2016–18 was distinct from the EU initiative on the future of Europe launched by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, which was conducted from 2019 through spring 2022.

2. Message from HAH Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, to the CEC Assembly in Novi Sad, 3 June 2018, [https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GEN\\_23\\_Metropolitan\\_Emanuel\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GEN_23_Metropolitan_Emanuel_EN.pdf).

3. The Most Rev. Anders Wejryd, a contribution to the CEC consultation "What Future for Europe?", <https://www.ceceurope.org/what-we-do/open-letter/>.

4. The Most Rev. the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, "Christian Presence and Witness in Europe: An Address to the Assembly of the Conference of European Churches," Novi Sad, Serbia, 3 June 2018, [https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GEN\\_19\\_Justin-Welby\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GEN_19_Justin-Welby_EN.pdf).

## **Churches in Europe Engaging in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace by Addressing Environmental Degradation and Climate Change**

Over the last several decades, our growing prosperity has increasingly come at the cost of an expanding ecological footprint, massive degradation of nature, and human-induced climate change. The fact that climate change is in the main human-induced, the result of industrialization based on the immense use of fossil fuels, has been a difficult scientific pill to swallow. Consequently, it has become clear that addressing climate change is a global objective in which industrialized countries have to play the major role. Along with that is the increasingly clear recognition that it is not possible to address climate change without also addressing its justice dimension. Churches have been instrumental in elaborating this reality.

The cornerstone of global efforts to effectively tackle climate change was the 2015 UN conference (COP21) in Paris. For churches in Europe, this was an opportunity to organize, under the heading of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, numerous events, and different branches of the pilgrimage across the continent. These expressed different churches' concerns and wishes related to climate change and were gradually united in a stream of pilgrims arriving in Paris.

As part of the pilgrimage, some European church leaders took part in a European consultation just a couple of weeks prior to COP21 and brought together the unity of their voices in a "Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders." Being aware that "life is a precious gift we have received" and "that climate change is indeed a threat to life," they underlined: "We raise our voices to the governments represented at COP21 in Paris to utilize the special momentum given on this highly significant occasion: COP21 provides a critical opportunity to benefit the whole of the human community. For the first time in over 20 years of UN negotiations, a global and comprehensive agreement on climate justice and climate protection—supported from all the nations of the world—can be reached." European faith leaders called for:

- The translation of "ecological stewardship into concrete climate action"
- "Inter-generational responsibility"
- "Ensuring climate justice"

- The initiation of “an unprecedented individual and structural transformation”; and
- “Real and visionary leadership . . . to phase in 100% renewable energy by the middle of the century.”<sup>5</sup>

These aims and visions have been repeatedly communicated to European political leaders in several rounds of dialogues between churches and the EU. The objectives of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace also had a large impact on the outcomes of the CEC General Assembly in Novi Sad in 2018. The assembly concluded that:

Increased emission of carbon dioxide from the industrialisation of the richest countries of the world has resulted in environmental degradation and global warming. Everyone is affected by climate change . . . [but] it is the poorest who suffer the most to adapt, including to extreme weather, lack of food, and the loss of land. It is unjust that those who have contributed the least to climate change suffer the most.

Today, we contribute to overuse resources and contribute to climate change. We need to change our consumption and production system to combat climate change, as well as drastically reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by increasing the use of green energy and significantly lessen the use of fossil fuels. . . .

One of the most pressing needs of our present time is to develop a public theology of sufficiency that takes seriously the voices of those marginalized and made poor by climate change. We need to learn when enough is enough.<sup>6</sup>

In order to address these concerns, the assembly formulated recommendations to strengthen engagement in this field:

- “Listen to the voices from the margins and hear from those who have first-hand experience of the effects of our over-consumption that puts such a strain on resources, people, and the environment.”

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5. “Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders on the Upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21,” Paris, 8 December 2015.

6. European Christian Environmental Network, “CEC General Assembly 2018 on Economic and Climate Justice,” Novi Sad, 6 June 2018, <https://www.ecen.org/articles/cec-general-assembly-2018-economic-and-climate-justice>.

- “Support churches in the fight against climate change on a local level.”
- Strengthen the voice of churches “on both national and regional levels regarding questions about climate change,” by working toward the advocacy on a European level together with other actors.
- “Work for intergenerational justice” and “advocate” for an alternative and sustainable economy.”<sup>7</sup>

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has been a strong and visible action of European churches in addressing the annual UN climate conference COPs that have taken place in Europe since the COP in Paris, namely Katowice (2018) and Glasgow (2021). These COPs were preceded by numerous local and regional events organized by churches, and by marches in different parts of the continent. Many of them have been endorsed enthusiastically by local church communities and have had the support of an increasing number of individual Christians in different parts of the continent. Some of these marches have arrived at the respective venues of COPs and have contributed to the visible presence of Christians there. The presence of numerous Christian groups and the increasing wish of Christians in Europe to get their voices heard in COPs by organizing events, prayers, and worship services, has been another sign of the immediate link between the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and the commitment of European churches to the struggle for climate justice.

All of this was possible thanks to the enormous engagement of many churches and thousands of Christians across the whole continent. The European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) has played an important role in engaging churches in work on creation care. Significantly, one of the ECEN assemblies took place in Katowice in October 2018 just a short time before the COP taking place in the same city that year. The aim of the event was to help churches raise their voices by publicly stating their concerns and clarifying that care for creation is an integral component of Christian faith. An illustration of the process can be heard in the concluding words of the ECEN Assembly in Katowice: “As people of faith we have a moral obligation to put the most vulnerable first in our calling to heal the earth. . . . To give life on earth a future with hope we must act now. . . . The

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7. European Christian Environmental Network, “CEC General Assembly 2018 on Economic and Climate Justice.”

extractive economy and lifestyle we know and enjoy are not sustainable.<sup>8</sup> The assembly invited churches in Europe to invest time and energy along with continuing advocacy on other important components of churches' action on climate change:

- “To build a new narrative of hope that addresses the seriousness of the situation but also promises a vision of more just and sustainable future.”
- “To develop theological and liturgical resources on care for creation, including Season of Creation liturgical calendars and sharing celebration of it in an open ecumenical spirit.”
- To engage with the Season of Creation—growing support of churches across the continent and across the wide ecumenical spectrum.

ECEN continues to offer, in the spirit of the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace, a forum for dialogue, exchange, and mutual support. These components are desperately needed to effectively address the key environmental challenges we are confronted with today.

The European Green Deal is the most recent and one of the most visible political objectives of the EU related to churches' questions on climate change and climate justice.<sup>9</sup> It has become one of the EU's flagship initiatives. It has several important components that respond to many of churches' concerns. The strong engagement of civil society and the voice of churches have played a vital role in securing the EU's strong commitment to effectively addressing climate change, to achieving climate neutrality, and creating a sustainable future. Still, there are some components of the Green Deal which, from the churches' perspective, deserve continuing attention, the most important of which include:

- The aim to leave no one behind, including peoples' participation in the process and the objective to addressing energy poverty.
- The wish to address an excessive ecological footprint, overconsumption, and the question of sufficiency.
- The global dimension of the European efforts to address climate

8. European Christian Environmental Network, “A Call from the Assembly: A Future with Hope,” Katowice, Poland, October 2018.

9. “European Green Deal,” European Commission, accessed 26 April 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal_en).

challenges with justice and responsibility, especially in view of the EU's relationship with Africa.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing climate justice has been a key component of efforts of churches in Europe to pursue peace. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has been for churches in Europe an opportunity to create a space where churches can meet, discuss common concerns, reflect on shared challenges, and engage in joint action. The pilgrimage has united numerous churches' activities in pursuing peace and justice in the specific context of the particular challenges faced by Europe in recent years. It has offered a space where diverse views can be expressed by one and enrich the other, and divisive questions can be discussed in a spirit of respect. "Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace" has been a theme allowing a deepening understanding of major theological and ethical questions and the strengthening of the bonds of Christian unity.

## 1.4

### “Just Do It Instead of Talking”: Experiences of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace from the Protestant Church in Germany\*

Sabine Udodesku, with Sabine Müller-Langsdorf  
and Christine Müller

“Just do it instead of talking”—that’s easy for Hildegard Wöhle to say. She stands in the Church of Saint-Merri in the heart of Paris with her backpack and walking sticks; four weeks of walking through Germany and France as a climate pilgrim are behind her. “Not only politicians make decisions, but also each and every one of us. Whether it is less visible if we avoid waste at home, or more clear to the outside, as with the climate march to Paris.”

The World Council of Churches (WCC) invited people to a pilgrimage of justice and peace at its 10th assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2013. The message from Busan states: “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 seed the Good News so that justice will grow and God’s deep peace rest on the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, the Synod of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) decided in November 2013 to accept this invitation in speech and action and to expressly support the WCC and actors in Germany in implementing the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The EKD with its 20 regional churches have been on the pilgrimage for eight years now and can draw on the experiences, insights, and results that they have gained in the context of the conciliar

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\* This chapter is based on an article first published in German in 2019: Auf dem Weg zu einer Kirche der Gerechtigkeit und des Friedens, Ein friedentheologisches Lesebuch im Auftrag des Präsidiums der Synode der EKD, hrsg. durch das Kirchenamt der EKD Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig.

1. “Join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,” Message of the 10th Assembly of the WCC, 30 October to 8 November 2013, <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/MC%2001%20ADOPTED%20Message%20of%20the%2010th%20Assembly.pdf>.

process for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation, and the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–10). This includes the areas of climate change, life-affirming economics, peace work, and the commitment to human dignity. During these eight years, the EKD has established the Ecumenical Pilgrimage for Climate Justice as a clear focus. This pilgrimage has brought its demands to the UN climate conferences in Paris (2015), Katowice (2018), and Glasgow (2021). Even the COVID-19 pandemic could not stop the pilgrims. Meanwhile, national borders are also being crossed, such as those to France, Poland, England, Scotland, and the Netherlands. In the year of the 11th Assembly of the WCC, the 6th climate pilgrimage will head to Karlsruhe.

In 2022, the topic of gender justice has also been brought into the pilgrimage as an important topic. The first successes of the “Go for Gender Justice” pilgrimage initiative will be presented at the WCC Assembly in September 2022.<sup>2</sup>

Christians see gospel values of justice and peace being attacked locally and globally. Therefore, they embark on the pilgrimage within a world that urgently needs the commitment of all people of good will. God’s justice and peace are already on the way as a sign of the coming kingdom of God.

The implementation of the pilgrimage idea places a focus on togetherness. It is about strengthening community, witnessing together, building trust and understanding, and being inspiring and innovative—being open and inviting to the transformation of a deeply unjust world. On the pilgrimage, further connections are made beyond the member church, denominational, and religious borders, and new partnerships form. The Conference on Ecumenism, Mission and Development (KÖME), in which all EKD regional churches and thematically involved works and organizations are represented, is of great importance as a platform for the exchange of information, mutual inspiration, and joint action. It offers the pilgrimage an opportunity to shape ecumenism locally, nationally, and internationally, and to act together.

We are together on the journey with the 352 WCC member churches from over 110 countries on all continents, with European and international partner organizations, with the Association of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK), and secular partners. Ten regional churches adopted synod resolutions on participation in the pilgrimage. All 20 regional churches are now active on

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2. For more on the “Go for Gender Justice” pilgrimage activity, see [www.go-for-gender-justice.de](http://www.go-for-gender-justice.de).

the pilgrimage, along with ACK churches, mission organizations, and church and secular organizations, such as *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World), Misereor, BUND, Greenpeace, and Climate Alliance.

These following four sections show how the churches have set out together.

### **Long-Term Training within the Framework of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, 2018–20, by Sabine Müller-Langsdorf**

*Via positiva; via negativa; via transformativa*: these three dimensions of pilgrimage inspired the idea of long-term training for church workers on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The training aimed to guide church employees from the fields of ecumenism, the community, and development-related educational work to prominent places of complaint, praise, and transformation with regard to the issues of justice and peace. The participants became familiarized with key themes such as peace, justice, sustainability, and economy. Following are some sample training events:

- In Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance, an armaments factory was visited and the peace-ethical challenges in view of the “death made in Germany” were discussed with trade unions, the church, factory management, and peace initiatives.
- Geneva is the seat of many international organizations. Here the participants looked at the power of international cooperation in political and church matters.
- The small town of Witzenhausen in northern Hesse is home to one of two universities in organic farming in Germany. In cooperation with the university, the advanced training group was introduced to questions of sustainable agriculture.
- Brussels, as the seat of the European Union, is where one can learn how questions of a just economic or peace order are politically negotiated in European structures and what role the churches can play in these deliberations.
- The last module of the training took place in Berlin at Brot für die Welt. Here the participants looked at the work of a church development organization and found suggestions for concrete further work.

The training was a type of pilgrimage. It offers a “view of your own field.” From across the country, the Protestant regional churches of Hesse-Nassau, Hesse Electorate-Waldeck, Baden, and Württemberg, 20 church employees came together for five four-day courses over a period of two years. The opportunity for exchange with colleagues from other regional churches and encounter with people from other professional groups and professions through these visits provided essential motivation for participation. In addition, there was the opportunity to get to know institutions and initiatives for justice and peace inside and outside of church work. The power of networking was experienced in concrete terms and the community “with all people of good will” shows the strength of civil society commitment and deepens ecumenical solidarity.

The further training was organized by the *Kirchliche Entwicklungsdienst* (KED, or “Church Development Service”) peace and ecumenical representatives of the regional churches involved, and was financially supported by regional church grants and support from the EKD Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace project office.

Between the individual course sections, the participants met in regional groups. There they could reflect on what they have experienced and develop practical suggestions for their own work. The training ended in 2020. A highlight was the visit to the offices of the WCC and the United Nations in Geneva. There, a meeting with an NGO on the subject of business and human rights resulted in a resolution that the training group passed on to church leaders, the WCC, and those responsible for politics in all four national churches.

## **Ecumenical Pilgrimage for Climate Justice from Bonn to Katowice, by Christine Müller**

For decades, I have been committed to working with the social movements to create awareness in our churches and in politics that we in the rich North, especially in Germany, live at the expense of people and nature in the global South. The consequences of our actions impact on other parts of the world. My focus is on the topic of justice. I believe that there can be no solutions to the climate crisis without raising the question of resource justice and social justice. Peace in the world also depends to a large extent on this.

Therefore, from the beginning of our 3rd Ecumenical Climate Justice Pilgrimage from Bonn to Katowice, I referred to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace that was approved at the 2013 WCC assembly in Busan, Korea. During the planning, we took up the suggestion from Busan to visit points of pain and places of strength. We agreed that the biggest climate killer is lignite and that by phasing out lignite in Germany, we would be a considerable step closer to the goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

When I saw on the map that the route also passed our Saxon state church, I was immediately inspired. Key decision makers were inspired to support this path. I myself live in the south of Leipzig, which is still being damaged in some places by opencast lignite mining. I especially wanted to draw attention to our neighbouring village of Pödelwitz. Pödelwitz is a 700-year-old farming village that is set to fall victim to the Mitteldeutsche Braunkohle AG (MIBRAG) opencast lignite mine in 2028–29. It is like a struggle between David and Goliath: a large corporation is gradually buying up plots of land in Pödelwitz. This is despite the fact that the site has not even been earmarked for opencast mining and is on the outskirts of the village.

However, the remaining 26 residents of Pödelwitz continue to fight. Among them is the blacksmith, Thilo Kraneis. His father is about to resettle for the third time: after fleeing Silesia, the family settled in Heuersdorf and had to make way for coal. “I’ll stay here, no matter what happens,” emphasizes Thilo Kraneis. Together with his neighbours, he is fighting against the overpowering MIBRAG like David once fought against Goliath. He recently terminated the contract with his main employer, Mitteldeutsche Braunkohle AG (MIBRAG). But maybe he will soon find a new employer: the parish church council has decided to thoroughly renovate the old church. This is a sign of hope for the people in this region.

To my great surprise, it turned out that the “Pödelwitz Stays” initiative has also become known internationally. When meeting with Thilo Kraneis and other interested parties, the Pilgrim Base briefly reported on their support of the Peruvian mountain guide and Andean farmer Saúl Luciano Lliuya. It turned out that Pödelwitz has the same lawyer as Saúl Luciano. Saúl Luciano Lliuya’s civil lawsuit is the first of its kind in European courts. Its aim is to hold major polluters such as RWE AG (a listed energy supply group based in Essen) accountable and to persuade them to adopt less harmful business models. This should create new legal options for those affected. Above all, however, the pressure should increase to develop national and international political solutions for dealing with climate-related damage and losses.

After 92 days and 1883 kilometres, the pilgrims of the 3rd Ecumenical Pilgrimage for Climate Justice reached their destination in Katowice on 7 December 2018. They demanded more climate justice for other regions and for future generations from the politicians of the world and especially from Germany. Not only in Germany, but also in Poland, you got into conversation with people on the streets, in churches, in schools, in town halls, and in parliaments, about the causes and consequences of our way of doing business and our lifestyle. They publicized their ideas for phasing out coal and campaigned for support from the federal government. As an educator, I am convinced that this ecumenical pilgrimage is one of the best ways to raise awareness of issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation.

### **Synod of the Nordkirche on the Pilgrimage Route**

The regional synod of the *Nordkirche* (the Church of Northern Germany) decided in 2014 that each synod meeting within the current legislative period should form its own way station on the pilgrimage route. For a few hours, the synod will deal with an issue on which the church should have a position, which requires theological reflection, and which calls on the church to act. Here, alternative forms of devotions, prayers, church services, and celebrations are to be developed and new approaches to the Bible are to be made possible through Bible sharing, Bible study, and bibliodrama. Thematic consultations on the issues of integration and social coexistence, refugees and asylum, xenophobia, poverty and social participation, and globalization are combined with this spiritual experience. The synod was of the opinion that the pilgrimage orients the church away from its self-centredness toward a global perspective on justice and peace, and thus also promotes and demands dialogue with other partners in the interreligious and secular areas.

### **“To Become a Church of Just Peace”—The EKD Continues the Process**

In the spring of 2012, the Baden State Church started a discussion process on a reorientation of peace ethics, which led to a resolution on the topic at the 2013 autumn synod. In addition to a discussion paper, translated as “Guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79), which was a contribution to the discussion from the Evangelical Church in Baden, this document also contains twelve concrete statements with the aim of becoming a church of

just peace. Since then, they have formed the basis for further efforts on peace ethics by the Protestant Church in Baden.<sup>4</sup>

Other regional churches have now also passed resolutions on peace ethics, including the Bremen Evangelical Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hanover, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Central Germany, and the Protestant Church in Rhineland.

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4. See the website of the Evangelical Church in Baden, Just Peace Church, at [https://www.ekiba.de/html/content/kirche\\_des\\_gerechten\\_friedens950.html](https://www.ekiba.de/html/content/kirche_des_gerechten_friedens950.html).



## 1.5

### The Pilgrimage App: An Innovative Project for the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Verena Hammes

The project of developing an app, that is, a computer application, for the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has taken up the pilgrimage idea in an innovative and inspiring way.

#### The Basics

On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail.

—Charta Oecumenica

With these words, the *Charta Oecumenica*, the declaration of commitment of the churches in Europe, which was signed in Strasbourg in 2001 and ratified by the German churches in 2003, calls for peace and justice.<sup>1</sup> Although it will be 20 years old next year, it has lost none of its explosiveness in the current situation of war in Europe. The keywords *peace*, *justice*, and *integrity of creation* go back much further in the history of the WCC. For example, in 1968, at the 4th Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala—the last in Europe—a public commitment was made to work for peace and justice. In 1983, in response to the threat of weapons of mass destruction, the WCC called for the so-called Conciliar Process at its assembly in Vancouver. In Germany, these calls fell on fertile ground and have been continuously developed over the decades. Especially in the former GDR and in the course of the Peaceful Revolution that led to the opening of its borders, these catchphrases repeatedly provided impetus for change in politics and society.

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1. Conference of European Churches and the Roman Catholic Council of European Bishops' Conferences, *Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*, Strasbourg, 22 April 2001. The epigraph that opens this chapter is found on page 7.

Since the beginnings of the ecumenical movement, the commitment to peace and justice has been a high priority in international and national ecumenical work. At its most recent assembly in Busan, South Korea, in 2013, the WCC proclaimed a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. An international working group visited various places of pain in the world that were affected by discord, injustice, or destruction, and thus expressed solidarity with the people living there. In the invitation to the pilgrimage, the fundamental dimensions are detailed:

1. Strengthen the community. The pilgrimage of justice and peace aims to strengthen the cohesion and unity of the pilgrims (individuals, member churches, and ecumenical groups).
2. Bear witness together. By taking the pilgrimage seriously, the Christian partners can set an example and bear witness to the message of Jesus by doing things together.
3. Encouraging spirituality, reflection, and ecumenical formation. Praying together and reflecting on spiritual treasures can strengthen the pilgrimage and the pilgrims.
4. Build trust and understanding. In working together for justice and peace, it is necessary to unite with all “people of good will.”
5. Communicate in an inspirational and innovative way to achieve effective visibility.<sup>2</sup>

## The Idea

The Working Group of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) had already set up a working group after the WCC assembly in Busan with the aim of implementing an ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Germany. After an organized pilgrimage for mostly young people to Israel in 2018 and a pilgrimage as part of the Reformation World Exhibition in Wittenberg in 2017, the idea of developing an app based on the dimensions of the pilgrimage matured in 2019. On the one hand this would offer pilgrimage experiences in everyday life, and on the other hand, it would be an innovative way to spread the idea of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. As with a real pilgrimage, the idea was that the virtual one should have a beginning and an end. It was

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2. An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (revised), WCC Central Committee 2–8 July 2014, Geneva, Switzerland, sec. V, para. 3, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2014/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>.

obvious to aim for the next WCC assembly, the first in Germany, originally planned for September 2021. The 3rd Ecumenical Church Congress in Frankfurt am Main in May 2021 was a good place to start. But then the coronavirus pandemic made travel and community gatherings almost impossible, so the WCC assembly was postponed to the summer of 2022. After a brief consultation within the working group, it was nevertheless clear that we wanted to stick to the starting and ending points and extend the app's term by almost a year. This is how the app started during the 3rd Ecumenical Church Congress in May 2021.

## Implementation

When the idea was born, the pandemic was still a long way off, but there were already signs of an immense digital transformation. Apps that accompany existing pilgrimage routes, such as the most famous one to Santiago de Compostela, are already on the market. However, there are few apps that are completely designed for digitality, enabling pilgrims to go on pilgrimage on their own doorstep. With the help of the company OkayFactor in Berlin, an app was developed over the course of 2019 and 2020 that makes this possible for a pilgrimage of justice and peace.

From the beginning, it was important to the working group not simply to design a new mindfulness app, but rather to qualify this pilgrimage with the keywords *peace*, *justice*, and *integrity of creation*. The journey includes places of pain but also of hope: it doesn't have to be only the war zones of this earth that make people aware that injustice and discord prevail.

We must note here that app development entails financial challenges that the ACK would not have been able to cope with on its own. It was therefore all the more important to get financially strong partners on board who would focus primarily on the developmental and political dimensions of the pilgrimage route. With the help of Bread for the World, the Catholic Fund, the Digital Innovation Fund of the EKD and the project office of the Pilgrims' Path for Justice and Peace of the EKD, the development of the app became possible, and the extended term was financially secured.

## Functions of the App

The functions of the bilingual app (German/English) on the seven-week digital pilgrimage are based on the four dimensions of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, as mentioned above.

### *Strengthening community*

All pilgrims go outside for at least 30 minutes every day and take time for themselves. The app also offers several functions to create a sense of community on the pilgrimage route despite the physical distance between the pilgrims. There are chat functions that pilgrims can use to communicate with one another. Every day, each pilgrim can leave a digital waymark for other pilgrims. These landmarks are photos of places or events encountered on the daily pilgrimage, as well as associated thoughts. As on a real pilgrimage route, fellow pilgrims can meet in hostels on the weekends where, for example, they may photograph their pilgrim shoes when entering the hostel and upload the photos in the entrance area for everyone to see. The café area in each hostel as well as the guest book there invite pilgrims to exchange information about their pilgrimage experience.

### *Bearing witness together*

Each hostel is looked after by hostel parents, who may be individuals, congregations, or ecumenical groups. They organize the hostel according to their ideas, offering the pilgrims something to talk about and opportunities to get to know their work. The pilgrims can choose their own weekly tasks and thus contribute in small ways to more justice, peace, or the integrity of creation. By being more mindful of their environment, they can set an example for the people around them. Targeted search functions can help to find fellow pilgrims who have the same weekly challenge, allowing them to encourage each other to reach their goals. Examples of challenges are less criticism, less plastic waste, more time for family and friends. Every day pilgrims can ask themselves whether they have mastered their task or not. On Mondays they can change their challenge and thus set a different focus for their daily activities.

### *Encouraging spirituality, reflection, and ecumenical formation*

There are several ways to pause on the digital pilgrimage route. One is to stop for prayer. The daily impulses that lead to the topics of peace, justice, and the integrity of creation are particularly suitable for this. Practical tips

for everyday life can be found here, as well as videos or pictures of different types of pain around the world. Pilgrim can also choose whether they prefer to spend spiritual time or make a pilgrimage with their feet. This means that the pilgrimage app can also be used barrier-free. Each hostel has its own chapel where prayers can be said, or candles lit for a special request. The ecumenical horizon is expanded by the changing hostel parents from different denominations and communities.

#### Building trust and understanding

The pilgrimage app is non-competitive. It's not about getting to the end of the route first. Rather, the app has a function that enables mutual assistance, building trust and understanding for those who could not complete the daily stage. In that case, a virtual white flag can be hoisted, so that fellow pilgrims know that someone needs help. Other pilgrims can then provide support by walking the appropriate stage for another, and thus helping that person to master the pilgrimage route.

#### *Communicating in an inspiring and innovative way*

This dimension has driven the pilgrimage app since its inception. From the outset, the goal of the app was to bring the topics of justice, peace, and integrity of creation into conversation in an innovative and inspiring way.

#### *Possibilities and Limitations*

Every project has opportunities and limitations. It is therefore important to look at the positive aspects as well as the negative ones. The pilgrimage app also leads one along a trail of justice and peace to places of pain in one's own environment. It deliberately uses a medium that is often misused as an instrument for discord and injustice: for example, in connection with hate speech. The app demonstrates to pilgrims how they can implement the topics of justice, peace, and integrity of creation in their everyday lives in small steps, such as by paying attention to transparent supply chains, purchasing fair trade products, and avoiding plastic. The digital pilgrimage thus transforms the idea of the classic pilgrimage of justice and peace. It has the potential to open up new perspectives, new target groups, and new ecumenical opportunities that accompany individuals and churches on the path to justice and peace. The experiences and evaluations of the more than 1000 users so far show that it has been possible to increase mindfulness in everyday life and to lead people to greater awareness of the pilgrimage topics. The experience has been repeatedly emphasized as valuable. The app has certainly become more

popular due to the coronavirus pandemic and the associated restrictions on real pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage app is still a test: Can the themes of justice and peace be conveyed in such a way that a change in consciousness occurs even after the seven-week pilgrimage has ended? How sustainable is the app in the everyday life of the users? The success of one's own pilgrimage does depend on the motivation and perseverance of the pilgrims. Certainly, the app cannot lead to global peace and justice. The current situation in Ukraine makes our powerlessness very clear again. It is also unknown whether the app will continue beyond the timeframe of the coming WCC assembly in Karlsruhe—particularly if the WCC decides to focus on other issues in the years leading up to the next assembly. All of these are still open questions.

All in all, the pilgrimage app is an important project within the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. It is not the only one, of course, and therefore can only lead to success in combination with all the other efforts.

## 1.6

### A European Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace Event for Young People:

Memories of the Pilgrimage with MEET,  
Plön, Germany, 2015<sup>1</sup>

The pilgrimage organized and conducted by MEET in Plön in 2015 was a special experience for me. First, this was a good occasion to meet as a network wanting to work on ecumenical issues. There was something exciting about it because we had planned to hike together. That meant exposing us together to nature in northern Germany and spending a few hours together in rain, wind and sun, heat and cold. In the morning, bread was made, provisions were packed, and then we started. Lydia, an FÖJ worker at the Koppelsberg in Plön,<sup>2</sup> drove us to Plön by car, where after a few minutes of arriving and gathering we held our welcome prayer in the city church. The pilgrimage route was explained, we introduced ourselves and prayed and sang together. That's what we did at the final prayer at Kreuzberg in Bosau. The pilgrimage was thus a spiritual experience for us as a group that brought us closer to each other and also to God and God's creation. The picturesque scenery of the Plöner See and especially the 30 minutes of silence at the end of the route, where everyone could follow their own thoughts and hear the sounds of nature, served this purpose very well.

We were all actively involved. Judith Königsdörfer gave an introductory speech on the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. Lydia Funck presented her reflections on a just and creative peace (as part of the *via positiva*). Anna

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1. More Ecumenical Empowerment Together (MEET) is a German-speaking network of young people interested in ecumenism. This chapter based on a report by an unnamed participant in a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace event held in Plön, Germany, in September 2015. It was originally written in German and is available on the MEET website, <https://meet-junge-oekumene.de/2015/09/erinnerungen-an-das-pilgern-mit-meet-ploen-2015/>.

2. FÖJ, or *Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahre* ("Voluntary Ecological Year") is a programme in Germany that offers an educational year in environmental protection for persons aged 16–27, with the possibility of that developing into a career (*Ökologischer Bundesfreiwilligendienst* [Foundation for Ecological Volunteer Services], <https://foej.de/en/start-eng/>).

Habermann and Schulamit Kriener spoke on the theology of creation and God's promise in relation to the very concrete reality of climate change and the resulting damage to people and nature after floods in Myanmar (as part of the *via negativa*). These consequences of climate change make many people homeless, which in turn explains the increasing number of climate refugees. Kai Küle and Elisabeth Krause Vilmar prayed, sang, and reflected on the meaning of the cross with us as part of our final prayer service in beautiful Bosau. We were invited to say prayers (all as part of the *via transformativa*). In this way we could feel a sense of belonging not only theoretically but also practically to a group of northern European churches that have made the integrity of creation their concern in part by organizing a climate pilgrimage to the climate conference in Paris 2015. Through our walking we have also been able to feel connected and part of the larger pilgrimage of the WCC in its efforts to promote Christian unity.

## Special Moments

We stood in front of a barracks to reflect on creative peace, and just as we were about to leave and began to intone a song, we heard the barracks' weekly practice sirens. It was a surprising event to hear this "war signal" from the barracks alongside our voices that were comparatively so much weaker but much more pleasant.

It was good when we all sheltered from the rain under a few trees for the lunch break and shared the sandwiches and cakes we had brought with us. The fellowship seemed to be weathering the weather and spirits were upbeat.

An FÖJ worker revealed himself to be a highly professional and sensitive volunteer paramedic who unpacked his first aid kit when a participant feared an allergic reaction after a mosquito bite. So our guests or "followers" became our "rescuers" that day.

After 30 minutes of walking in silence on the last leg of the pilgrimage, I felt like I didn't want to start speaking anymore. I felt really comfortable not saying anything and just letting the rustling in the trees drown us all out.

It was a special place to reflect on the fate of thousands of people displaced by floods and typhoons in Myanmar and southeast Asia. On the boat from Bosau to Plön, I felt ambivalent to be so thankful for this thousand-year-old place, which gave rise to the northern Lake District during the last great ice age. On the other side, I saw the water masses of the lake and imagined all

my things, all my memories, and the places of my childhood and youth being washed over and away by the water to the bottom of the lake.

I admire the bravery and energy with which an acquaintance of mine in Myanmar goes with residents from her village to the construction work after the flood there.

I thank God for our lives and our community, and I ask for closeness that can be experienced and remain.



## 1.7

### The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in the Netherlands

Margarithe Veen

In 2014, the task force of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands was launched. This group is composed of individuals from various member churches of the Dutch Council, like the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the Roman Catholic Church, the Society of Friends, and the Salvation Army. Other members are representatives of partners of the Council, such as the peace organisation PAX and the Catholic Association for Ecumenism (the *Katholieke Vereniging voor Oecumene*), as was the former Stichting Oikos.

In March 2015, the first activity took place for the youth. Young people from various churches spent a weekend with each other to have the opportunity to become acquainted and to learn from each other and from their various Christian traditions. It was an ecumenical pilgrimage.<sup>1</sup>

Another activity in 2015 was the first Walk of Peace. In cooperation with partner Pax, the task force developed a concept for a Walk of Peace, held near 21 September, International Peace Day. To avoid a protest march for peace, the Walk of Peace was organized according to the three dimensions introduced by the Central Committee of the WCC in 2014: *via positiva*, *via negativa* and *via transformativa*.<sup>2</sup> From 2015 on, each walk contained dimensions of celebrating the gifts, visiting the wounds, and transforming injustices.

We tried to translate the three dimensions for the city of justice and peace, The Hague, in 2015. In 2016, another Walk of Peace was held in Enschede. In 2017, 2018, and 2019, more and more Walks of Peace were organized by church and peace groups in various cities and villages in the Netherlands. In 2022, there have been more than 31 Walks of Peace.<sup>3</sup> Not all of these

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1. "Young People Set the Tone," Council of Churches in the Netherlands, 20 February 2015, <https://www.raadvankerken.nl/nieuws/2015/02/jonge-mensen-zetten-toon/>.

2. *An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* (revised), WCC Central Committee, 2–8 July 2014, Geneva, Switzerland, 3–4, sec. IV, para. 3, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>.

3. For more information on the Walks of Peace, see "Walk of Peace," PAX, accessed 14 April 2022, <https://www.paxvoorvrede.nl/wat-wij-doen/programmas/walk-of-peace>.

have related to the three WCC dimensions; however, the Walk of Peace has become well known in the Netherlands since 2015. Those who are willing to organize a Walk of Peace are invited to translate the three dimensions to their own context in the search for a just peace.

## **The 70th Anniversary of the World Council of Churches in the Netherlands**

On 23 August 2018, the 70th anniversary of the WCC was celebrated in Amsterdam, where the organization was established in 1948. The *Concertgebouw* (“concert building”) and the Nieuwe Kerk (“New Church”) on the Dam Square were the sites of the historic event. That’s why in 2018, the ecumenical prayer was celebrated in the Nieuwe Kerk at the Dam Square in Amsterdam. There were other gatherings involving more than 300 people from various denominations and countries. The Youth Pilgrimage, the Symposium at the Protestant Theological Faculty, and the Walk of Peace were part of this celebration. The theme, though, was not “Man’s Disorder and God’s Design,” as it was in 1948. It was, according to the new ecumenical concept, “A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.” Members of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the Protestant Theological Faculty, Kerk in Aktie (“Church in Action”), members of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, and representatives of the World Council of Churches organized activities due to this special anniversary. It became part of the reception of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in the Netherlands.

As part of the 70th anniversary of the WCC, the board organized an ecumenical youth pilgrimage for young men and women from the Netherlands and other countries, who represented various Christian denominations. The youth brought stories of blessings, difficulties and wounds, and stories about transforming processes. They participated in an ecumenical pilgrimage of justice and peace by sharing stories and narratives and experiences conveying an enormous variety of emotions.<sup>4</sup> In a special session addressing the three dimensions of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the participants were asked to tell each other, with their shoe in their hand, about their blessings, their wounds, and their ways of transformation in their church and country. Three of these stories in relation to the three dimensions were told in the ecumenical prayer service in the Nieuwe Kerk on 23 August 2018.

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4. “On the Move—Youth Pilgrimage at #WCC Amsterdam,” World Council of Churches, 22 August 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_1jPfKn404c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1jPfKn404c).

Another activity related to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and the three dimensions was the Walk of Peace on 23 August in the centre of Amsterdam. This walk was organized by the board for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Working Group of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the Council of Churches in Amsterdam, and the Protestant Church in Amsterdam. The participants in this ecumenical walk faced the three dimensions of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace by telling stories of celebrating the gifts, seeing special monuments that are related to the wounds of the city, and meeting human beings who are part of transforming processes for men and women around them.

A special note is that during the walk, stories were told by the pilgrims themselves to their co-pilgrims. This was not organized, it just happened, and was valuable as well! More than 250 men, women, youth, and seniors from various denominations and backgrounds attended this special Walk of Peace that ended on the Dam Square next to the Nieuwe Kerk.

The service was prepared by representatives of the WCC, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, in cooperation with the staff of the Nieuwe Kerk Foundation.<sup>5</sup> The theme was “A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.” In the service, songs with words of blessings were part of the liturgy. The *kyrie* addressed the wounds of the injustices and the divided church of Christ. Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit preached about the essential love for transformation,<sup>6</sup> and Dr Agnes Abuom moved the hearts of the attendees by speaking about the injustices and wounds in our world and churches.<sup>7</sup>

The experience of organizing these activities in relation to a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in an ecumenical spirituality was an exhausting and inspiring experience for most of all participants, pilgrims, and members of the various boards.

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5. Celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the World Council of Churches, 23 August 2018, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=4&v=rDVSoGfMRHk&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=rDVSoGfMRHk&feature=emb_title).

6. Olav Fykse Tveit, “The Love of Christ Compels Us,” sermon of the WCC General Secretary in Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam, 23 August 2018, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/sermons/the-love-of-christ-compels-us-sermon-of-the-wcc-general-secretary-in-nieuwe-kerk-amsterdam>.

7. Agnes Abuom, “Relevance and Importance of WCC Today,” Reflection at the WCC 70th anniversary celebration service, Amsterdam, 23 August 2018, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/relevance-and-importance-of-wcc-today-reflection-by-dr-agnes-abuom-moderator-of-the-wcc-central-committee>.

## Menno's Global Youth Assembly

Another example is the first assembly of the Menno's Global Youth Assembly in May 2019, an initiative of young Mennonites in the Netherlands, who invited 40 young people from Europe to come Dopersduin in Schoorl to deepen the theme "On the Road"—a theme that is directly related to the new ecumenical concept of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. If COVID-19 had not affected all of us, the second youth assembly of this new initiative of young people would have taken place in Spain in 2020. As mentioned previously, the theme in 2019 was directly related to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. Another goal of the young Mennonites was to learn from each other and recognize that there is more unity in the churches of the young people than division.<sup>8</sup>

In October 2019, a group of young Mennonites from the Netherlands travelled as pilgrims to Ukraine to meet new friends, thanks to the Menno's Global Youth Assembly.<sup>9</sup> Before knowing about today's war in 2022, they faced the wounds of their new friends at this pilgrimage on the border of Ukraine and Russia in 2019. In that reality, they shared more stories of blessings, wounds, and transforming processes.<sup>10</sup>

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8. Read more on the Anabaptist World website at <https://anabaptistworld.org/young-anabaptists-go-on-the-road/>.

9. In March 2022, this experience shows how importance it is to become pilgrims in good times, so as to be able to share those friendships in difficult times of war.

10. "With Dorus, Lotte, and Rinske to Ukraine: 'They especially wanted to Show What a Beautiful Country They Live in,'" Family Baptismal Website, accessed 15 April 2022, <https://www.mgv.doopsgezind.nl/text.php?paginaid=4159>.

## 1.8

### A Personal Reflection from the United Kingdom

Susan Durber

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has certainly had a huge impact on this European woman, and I recognize that it is at least partly up to me to make sure that the impact is multiplied as much as possible. The effect on many of us who are European and who have engaged in this pilgrimage has been that our eyes have been opened to see realities in the world that are usually hidden from us. Visiting another place in the world and truly engaging the people there is far more consequential than diligently watching BBC World News. Meeting people, not as objects to study but as fellow pilgrims, people with whom you walk and who become your friends, opens you up to transformation. If a pilgrimage was once seen as a way of gaining merit, then for Europeans, perhaps this kind of pilgrimage has often been a way of moving hearts to sorrow and repentance. But it must also be a way of joyfully opening the world. It expands the self to meet those who practise Christian faith in very different circumstances and places, and to find that, nonetheless, we are united in faith. And it is deeply refreshing to find your own faith renewed in ways that could not be planned, but that often happen when on pilgrimage.

It is vital that the pilgrimage include team visits to European communities. To practise hospitality, Europeans need to be vulnerable and open. The joy of the pilgrimage is that it aims to be rooted in mutual accompaniment—that means no white saviours, no recreation of colonial obligations and expectations, no collusion with present power and economic imbalances. Pilgrimages are brilliant at putting everyone, for a time, on the same level, walking the same path, bearing the same pains, and needing the same encouragement. The differences and inequalities in the world are endemic and damaging, but a pilgrimage can challenge them and offer a new perspective to all participants. I am hoping that these European visits will be truly pilgrimages in the space where I belong.

I confess I have not heard the pilgrimage mentioned very much in the UK, beyond those of us already engaged in WCC work. But I do think that this way of renewing ecumenism would be welcomed in a context where many are

weariness, or not at all engaged with, other ways of reaching across the divides. There is currently a strong sense among UK churches that the way we live and engage with our communities must not be about “ministry to” but “being with.” This certainly echoes the spirit of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

## **Some of My Activities Related to the Pilgrimage**

I have been a member of the Theological Study Group for the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace from the beginning and have had the privilege to be part of several very different Pilgrim Team Visits. We met first as a Theological Study Group in Jerusalem; in that context we began to explore the implications and the significance of pilgrimage. In that remarkable place—itsself a holy place and also a place of great suffering and trauma—we quickly recognized that our task was not abstract but was rooted in reality and physicality. We reflected on pilgrimage as a metaphor but also as an embodied practice, and on how a turn towards a more embodied ecumenism might keep us moving together. As early as that first meeting, we began to recognize that this was about accompaniment and companionship, about walking together side by side—not about sorting out someone else’s life, church, or problems. It was about simply “being with,” as the incarnate Christ is God with us. We met people in that place who showed us communities and corners of Jerusalem that are not on the tourist trail, and we heard of experiences, pain, and transformation that moved us all deeply.

We resolved, at that meeting, to create publications (Bible studies, booklets, and a book)—and I was involved in various ways in all of them; including co-editing with Fernando Enns the book composed of chapters from varied authors and contexts called *Walking Together: Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*.<sup>1</sup> But it was very clear that the pilgrimage must be more than publications and would always need to be rooted in the real practice of visiting and *being with*, of living out a theology of accompaniment. It would need to value time spent with people, face the realities of life, include the whole of ourselves and all the wisdom we can bring to life, and treasure the unity we can find as we truly meet with one another and simply be together.

I led a team visit to Bangladesh in March 2019. We met in Dhaka and visited, among other groups, a Rohingya refugee camp near Cox’s Bazaar,

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1. Susan Durber and Fernando Enns, eds., *Walking Together: Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2018).

an organization supporting victims of acid attacks, and a project engaging women in changing agricultural practice in response to climate change. Accompanying those who are part of a Christian minority within a country where there are interreligious tensions and sometimes violence, we recognized how much our visit and attentiveness was appreciated. We were impressed to meet people who lived with so many challenges but were so welcoming and generous. As a white British woman, I learned new lessons about the impact of British colonialism and began to reappraise my own place in the world and the many ways in which I have benefitted from a privileged life. The meeting with the women who had survived acid attacks was profoundly moving as I reflected on the ways I understand my own “face” in the world. It was truly a pilgrimage moment for me to recognize that so many women in the world face violence and discrimination, sometimes in the most basic and brutal of ways. The visit has continued to influence my being and thinking. Since then, I have done research into British colonial history and its residual impact today.

In June 2019, I took part in a theological forum on racism in Tokyo, Japan. Here I reflected theologically on being a white, British woman as I faced something of the reality of the racist and colonial context in which I have lived. This was a life-changing experience and I have continued to pursue this study and reflection. In Japan we stayed in the YMCA for Korean people and learned something of how Koreans are regarded by many in Japan. On this visit I was once separated from the group and lost on the Metro, but I found myself again—perhaps a metaphor for the whole process of exploring British colonialism and racism and finding myself questioning and reappraising so much.

In June 2021, I was part of a Pilgrim Team Visit to Winnipeg, where I met online with people from indigenous communities. We heard testimony from those who told us of their experiences of racism and exclusion; of violence; of being undervalued so that women who go missing are not searched for; of being taught to despise your own culture and then of finding it again. At the end of our visit, the bodies of many children were found at a former residential school in unmarked graves. I was able to share online in worship and reflection the shock and deep sorrow of that finding. Again, I was faced with the realities and long-term impact of European racism and colonialism. I asked for more reading material and have since read nonfiction, memoirs, and novels that reflect the truths of indigenous people’s lives. I learned how colonialism used racism to enact cultural genocide. I learned how pervasive

racism is so that people can be taught even to despise themselves. I felt such sorrow and horror that it was European culture, and often some of the historical philosophers I've respected, who encouraged and made possible this thinking.

I have been engaged in a Pilgrim Team Visit to women in North America, where, again, I am being challenged to visit people and places I might never have gone. I have heard of pain, but also of courage and transformation.

## 1.9

### A Personal Impression from Finland

Maria Mountraki

I joined the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace Reference Group in 2017 and my first Pilgrim Team Visit was to Colombia. At this point the Reference Group had already made some Pilgrim Team Visits to other places around the world. As a member of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), I knew about the visits, and the plans made their way to our commission as well. In Colombia I was part of two different visits, one with the reference group and one with CCIA. Since then, I have taken part in Pilgrim Team Visits to Tanah Papua, Indonesia, and Fiji. I was also on a pilgrimage-related visit to Burundi. Some of the planned visits were cancelled due to the pandemic, but I have taken part in online Pilgrim Team Visits to Korea and North America.

After pilgrim teams visit different places, they come together and share what they have learned with the whole Reference Group. We share according to the three dimensions outlined in 2014 by the WCC Central Committee: “Celebrating the Gifts,” “Visiting the Wounds,” and “Transforming the Injustices.”<sup>1</sup> The dimensions bring structure to the visits and help us to find concrete steps forward, while celebrating the life. In listening to the other teams, I almost feel I have been on more visits just by learning and hearing from them.

Personally, I think the Pilgrim Team Visits are a great way to learn and show solidarity. Local residents are always in the centre of the visits; only through them can we acknowledge the real issues creating injustices. In those visits you can feel yourself transforming. As a European, the visits to different parts of the world have made an everlasting impact on me. They widened my perspectives on the world. A visit doesn't stop when we get back home; that is when reflection and sharing of the stories begins. I feel we must keep the stories alive to remind the international community and our local

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1. An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (revised), WCC Central Committee, 2–8 July 2014, Geneva, Switzerland, sec. IV, para. 3, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/an-invitation-to-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace>.

communities of the things we have learned. The world is truly global but also one. We are working for the common goal of achieving just peace.

I have not been on a similar visit within Europe. As the focus in 2022 is again on Europe, there are plans for visits to different European countries. I am really interested to learn about and possibly join those visits. We have had people who have visited marginal groups in their own contexts, and I think those events have been truly life-changing for them personally. Therefore, we should also remember to make pilgrimages to situations or places that are close to us.

## 1.10

### Impressions from Italy

Guido Dotti

Two elements complicate the work of drawing up a report on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Europe. On the one hand, the Pilgrim Team Visits planned for this year on the European continent have not yet taken place. On the other hand, the tragedy of the war in Ukraine has broken into the lives of Europeans, shattering entire populations, and making reflections on justice, peace, migratory flows, the search for truth, and the healing of traumas more brutally topical than ever. In addition, there is a link between these two elements. At first it was thought that a Pilgrim Team Visit could go to Ukraine itself, but this was abandoned because the existing intra-ecclesial tensions seemed too acute and delicate to allow it to be carried out according to the intentions of the pilgrimage.

The report therefore seeks above all to take account of the effects of the various stages of the pilgrimage on the churches in Europe or, more modestly, on the European members of the Reference Group and the Theological Study Group (TSG).

In terms of the four axes around which the reflection of these years has been focused—truth and trauma, land and displacement, gender justice, and racism—we can say that the impact of the last two themes in Europe is not too different from that in other areas of the world. The challenges confronting the European churches and societies in the work to affirm the dignity of every human being, build peace, and heal the wounds in the field of gender justice and the fight against racism and hate speech are similar to those in other areas of the world.

Reflection on the other two axes, however, particularly challenges the thinking and action of the churches in Europe. During the years of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, our experiences and meetings with the different local contexts have called Europe to account on two key issues: the legacy of European colonialism and the management of the migration phenomenon. These two issues are closely related.

The colonial mentality and behaviour that for centuries characterized both the politics of many western European countries and the evangelizing mission of the continent's churches are responsible for wounds that are still alive in many areas of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Only by reconstructing the historical truth, listening to the wounded, repenting, and asking for forgiveness, and caring for relationships can we help to heal the traumas caused by these behaviours. Similarly, disregarding the suffering caused by colonialism only renews the traumas and prevents the re-establishment of mutual trust. The credibility of the proclamation of the gospel depends to a large extent on the ability to empathize with the peoples who have suffered as a result of the colonizers' behaviour, which is so antithetical to the teaching of the gospel and to the universal ethic of human rights itself.

With regard to the phenomenon of migration and the various causes that generate it—wars, famine, poverty, climate change, and dictatorial regimes—it should be stressed that many European countries have been transformed over the last century from countries of emigration into immigration destinations. But unfortunately, the removal of the past, the lack of memory, and the denial of the truth have led in Europe to the rejection of people forced to leave their homeland in search of a life worthy of the name for themselves and their children. This lack of empathy and inability to manage integration that respects diversity has also encouraged a resurgence of racism and the spread of hate speech, which has also led to episodes of deadly violence.

## **Section 2**

### **Contributions on Justice and Peace**

Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.

—Psalm 106:3

This section contains articles on issues of justice and peace in Europe, from the context of churches, but not necessarily officially organized parts of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. These contributions from individuals do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the World Council of Churches or its members. They are offered to stimulate thought, debate, and international comparison.



## 2.1

### Justice and Racism

Richard Reddie

I am passionate about justice-related issues, and I have been privileged to carry out a number of justice-related roles for church and parachurch organizations. Many of these positions had a racial justice dimension, so I have been able to observe how racial justice is largely regarded within church and society. I would argue that racial justice came back on the world's agenda, largely due to an act of violence a couple of years ago. As we know, in May 2020, George Perry Floyd, Jr., a 45-year-old Black man living in Minneapolis, USA, was murdered by Derek Chauvin, a serving police officer. That callous act proved to be the catalyst for conversations, ruminations, and actions centring on racial justice. I would also contend that there is a clear correlation between racism and violence, and that in its most acute form, racism always manifests itself in acts of violence.

Equally, history shows that it invariably takes acts of racist violence for racial justice to come back on the agenda. For instance, Britain experienced a “George Floyd” moment in April 1993, after Stephen Lawrence, a Black London teenager, was savagely killed by a gang of white youths in a racist attack. In the aftermath of that tragedy, there was much soul-searching in British society, and it led to, among other responses, the establishment of “Racial Justice Sunday” to address racism in church and society. What is more, that event forced British churches to hone their theological thinking on racial justice, recognizing that the God we serve is a God of justice. In turn, they paid greater attention to other scripture verses that were hidden in plain sight, such as the fact that we are all made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and are loved equally by God. Moreover, our ethnic or racial diversity is part of God's handiwork, which should be celebrated rather than feared or ignored. Finally, churches increasingly have understood that anything denying the humanity in a person is sinful because that person is made in God's image: any rejection of the individual is also a rejection of God.

These theological ideas spurred many British churches into engaging with racial justice. I feel particularly proud that a Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) programme supported the Lawrence family's subsequent

campaign for justice, both spiritually and financially.<sup>1</sup> (The Lawrence family failed to receive the appropriate level of police support, especially the police's investigation into finding Stephen's killers, and were forced to embark on a justice-related campaign that continues today.) However, what the Lawrence case also did was to shine a light on similar incidences of Black and Asian Britons being killed in racist violence, with most of the perpetrators not being brought to justice. At that time, the real issue was twofold: How can we keep our young people safe, and how can we get justice for those whose lives were lost to racial violence? So, the issue was one of justice and peace, and I would argue that it has remained so, even today.

George Floyd's murder also reignited the Black Lives Matter movement across the globe. In many of the world's towns and cities there were demonstrations and protests throughout 2020. A great deal of the activity in Britain was led by young Black people who were demanding better outcomes than those experienced by their parents and grandparents. These events became justice matters: demands for equality and an end to bigotry. What was fascinating about these protests was that many of the organizers were connected to the church. And while these socially-distanced demonstrations (during the COVID-19 lockdown period) were not church gatherings, they were reminiscent of those led by the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, during the civil rights era in the United States. Most of the British marches were peaceful and based on Dr King's philosophy of non-violent civil disobedience. However, when on the few occasions they failed to remain peaceful, the authorities played the "law and order" card, using the violence as a pretext to condemn the overall cause.

As someone with a zeal for justice and a commitment to peace, I always find it troubling that we believe there can be order even if we fail to uphold the law. In many parts of the world, there are laws in place to tackle racism and discrimination, yet those laws are often flouted, sometimes by the very same people who are there to uphold them: think of police officer Derek Chauvin and George Floyd, or the woeful criminal justice system that disproportionately incarcerates Black and Brown people on both sides of the Atlantic. It should therefore come as no surprise when "order" is flouted because people have no faith in the laws that appear to work against them.

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1. For information on the work of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, see the organizational website, <https://ctbi.org.uk>.

The scenario is similar to the concepts of justice and peace. The late, great reggae singer and musical *compadre* of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, famously sang that “I don’t want no peace, I need equal rights and justice.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, it has been the situation in both church and society that individuals and groups with a rock-solid commitment to work for peace, sometimes have less of an appetite for justice, especially racial justice. In truth, they go hand in hand. I would also argue that if peace is the destination, then justice is the journey: You cannot arrive in Peace-ville without first trudging along the Justice Highway!

Issues concerning justice, peace, and young people in Britain and Ireland are crystalized in the work to address serious youth violence or “knife crime.” This scourge on society annually sees hundreds of young people dying before their time or maimed or incarcerated. Consequently, many in the next generation of lawyers, teachers, doctors, and preachers either languish in prisons, or worse still, are buried in cemeteries. When Jesus spoke about the “abundant life” that he came to offer,<sup>3</sup> he surely did not have these scenarios in mind. CTBI is part of the Synergy Network, a group of churches and parachurch organizations working to end the killing and mayhem on our streets. I am involved in this work because serious youth violence is a justice issue in Britain; it is prevalent in the poorest areas of our towns and cities, and is inextricably linked to deprivation, unemployment, and school exclusions. What is more, it tends to particularly impact young Black males.

One of the police responses to addressing serious youth violence involves “stop and search” tactics in which police frisk young people for weapons. This strategy is controversial because not only does it disproportionately target young Black men, but statistics also reveal that the vast majority of these police interventions do not result in the seizure of weapons. As such, this approach increases distrust between Black communities and the police. Moreover, critics also point out that while areas with high incidences of serious youth violence have a sizeable police presence, overall crime rates remain high, leading to the paradox of these communities being “over-policed, yet under-protected.” While the British police are tasked with maintaining law and order, this falls within their wider remit of “protecting and serving.”

Part of the challenge, once again, is to ensure that our young people remain safe and that our streets are peaceful. The Synergy Network has been

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2. Peter Tosh, “Equal Rights,” written and performed by Peter Tosh, on *Equal Rights*, Columbia Records, 1977.

3. See John 10:10.

calling on churches to open their doors on specific days and times of the week to offer safe spaces and positive diversionary activities to young, vulnerable people. While we should be praying for our young people and their families, there are also lots of tangible activities that churches can do to keep the peace. One such response involves installing “knife bins”—receptacles into which knives and dangerous weapons can be deposited to keep them out of harm’s way. However, the real challenge in addressing serious youth violence is the need to build greater trust and confidence in the police among young people. Without this, there will be no resolution to the problem. In an effort to break down barriers and build bridges, CTBI has organized several events that have brought together the two groups.

This report is written at a time of war: Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine. One of the obvious consequences of war is the flight of people into neighbouring countries in search of sanctuary. What is intriguing about this situation, from a British perspective, is that while the British government says it will welcome Ukrainian refugees with open arms, there is currently legislation going through Parliament that would make it harder for most people to claim asylum in Britain. Various Christian charities and organizations, including CTBI’s Churches’ Refugee Network (CRN), believe that the Nationality and Borders Bill, as it is known, goes against Christian principles of hospitality and sanctuary. Along with over 1000 faith leaders, the CRN was a signatory of a letter calling on the government to change its mind.

The Nationality and Borders Bill follows on from other pieces of draconian legislation designed to make life harder for those living in Britain without the appropriate paperwork. Between 2012 and 2014, the coalition government at that time introduced the “Hostile Environment” policy, designed to encourage those without the “right” to live in Britain to leave; it called on British people to make sure that those who used public and social services had the right to do so. For many, this policy was divisive; it created distrust, encouraged discrimination, and led to financial deprivation. Additionally, in 2016, Britain’s decision to leave the EU saw a massive spike in reported race-related hate crime. A plethora of these crimes took the form of physical assaults. Similarly, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents have escalated in recent years, highlighting the increasing intolerance in British society.

During Lent this year, I was the first of several speakers to deliver talks focusing on the Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr’s vision of the “Beloved Community.” As a Dr King aficionado, it was with mixed feelings that I spoke about how justice, peace, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation would

form the pillars on which such a society would be built (for everyone). While it is always great to talk about Dr King's work and ideas, it was poignant because from a British perspective, there has never been a more important time for us to be committed to justice and seek the way of peace—to which King committed his life and died while pursuing. Yet, I still believe that the Church, if it holds firmly to the teachings of scripture, has a vital role to play in this work to create the Beloved Community. The God we serve is a God of justice. God's son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is also the Prince of Peace. What more inspiration do we need than that!



## 2.2

### Peace Building toward Convivial Life Together

Janka Adameová

The International Academy for Diaconia and Christian Social Action, Central and Eastern Europe (Interdiac) is a dynamic and growing academy with 16 partner organizations supporting diakonia and social action in central and eastern Europe and central Asia.<sup>1</sup> People of Interdiac are called to build up a learning community for Christian social action and conviviality.

Interdiac has created a new learning programme which sets participants from eastern and central Europe on the journey towards developing ideas on convivial life together. This new initiative is being undertaken by Interdiac partners in central and eastern Europe and central Asia. It is a response to the numerous challenges to peaceful living in this region.

The learning programme model was developed by the Interdiac team through a consultative process with active practitioners from partner organizations. This process ensured that the programme is rooted in the regional context and builds on the experience of Interdiac partner organizations from several countries.

This process supports the aim of integrating the theory and practice of conflict transformation that runs through it. The learning programme stands for sustainable change that starts with a change of a personal narrative, located in each specific context. It is built on the recognition that conflict is very often based on issues of identity and power, separately or combined, and that such conflict prevents convivial life.

Rooted in the recognition that conflict is an integral part of life, the programme aims to develop the knowledge and skills for the practice of conflict transformation, to enable the participants to learn new approaches and methods, and to revise and reflect on their approaches to conflict resolution.

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1. For more information, see the Interdiac website, at <https://www.interdiac.eu/>.

In one programme, participants from 13 countries undertook a one-year journey. They worked toward developing the professional and personal skills and expertise needed for the responsible practice of conflict transformation. The diversity of the group itself (in terms of nationality, age, and professional experience) accelerated learning from different contexts and living and working perspectives. The programme started with autobiographical work and reflection, because work on conflict transformation requires a deep level of understanding of previous experience and socialization. This mirrors the causes of conflict and approaches to addressing conflict among people who are acting based on their previous experience.

In this way, the programme aims to create a double learning process whereby the participants develop their knowledge and understanding of practices to transform conflict. This is achieved through working with people in conflict to enable them to understand the roots of conflict. The programme addresses interpersonal and intergroup conflict as well as structural and political conflict. Interdiac intends to continue running this programme in the future and to develop other initiatives in the area of just and non-violent communication.

The Interdiac approach to learning is rooted in “liberating pedagogy,” which has its origins in the work of the Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire.<sup>2</sup> This approach informs the experiential learning that is built on the integration of practice and theory, on reinventing ordinary reality by addressing it with provocative questions. This exposes the questions of power and the way that it shapes personal lives.

In the learning process we work to ensure the active involvement and reflection of the participants, who are invited to explore further and question visible and invisible borders that undermine social cohesion and prevent social inclusion within and among people.

On different levels of society, varying from close environmental settings to the societal and cross-border macro level, our goal is to reveal new ways of recognizing and handling differences through conflict transformation. We then explore approaches to building up vision and practice to achieve a higher quality of personal well-being and to promote new developments in society.

The term that best describes inner personal peace and peace in relation to others is *shalom*—“dynamic peace,” which is based on harmony with oneself,

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2. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1970).

as well as the aspiration to seek human dignity, equity, and justice in society. Peace as *shalom* will be explored further with the Interdiac partners, especially in the times of the invasion of Ukraine and its consequences across and beyond the region. The understanding about peace will be revisited based on personal experiences with different layers of the ongoing conflict.



## 2.3

### The European Peace Church Network and the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Antje Heider-Rottwilm and Lydia Funck

#### The Roots

In these times of war, we look back to the year 1948. After the horrible experiences of two world wars, the 1st Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), held in Amsterdam, stated: “War is contrary to the will of God.”<sup>1</sup>

The member churches were challenged to critically examine their theological roots and their attitude regarding military violence and witness for peace. The WCC asked the Historic Peace Churches to take an active part in this discussion. In response, those churches have organized various theological consultations (Puidoux conferences) since 1949. They brought together European Mennonites and Quakers, as well as representatives of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Historic Peace Churches in North America.

At the heart of their discussions was the question: What does it mean to be called to be a peace church?

The consultations aimed, firstly, to highlight the incompatibility between being a disciple of Jesus and going to war, and secondly, to promote the formation of a European network of individuals and groups sharing the Christian pacifist conviction.

These discussions, controversies, and projects resulted in the founding in 1978 of Church and Peace as the European ecumenical peace church network.<sup>2</sup> Since then, more than 50 communities, convents, congregations, theological

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1. Statement of the 1st Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Amsterdam, 1948, as quoted in Sara Speicher and Donald F. Durnbaugh, “Historic Peace Churches,” August 2003, World Council of Churches Ecumenical Dictionary, “Article of the Month” Series, <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/dictionary-article4.html>.

2. For more information on Church and Peace, see the organizational website, at <https://www.church-and-peace.org/>.

study centres, peace organizations, and peace service organizations, as well as individuals in 14 European countries have joined. They bring together Anglicans, Baptists, members of the Church of the Brethren, Lutherans, Mennonites, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Quakers, and members of Reformed churches.

Members live out, in various ways, the call to non-violence. They find unity in shared prayer and worship, a common commitment to non-violence, and in responding to the call to take action in the world as Christ's community through:

- the commitment for reconciliation
- dialogue, peace education, and conflict management
- action for justice and the right sharing of the world's resources, and
- caring for God's creation

## **Celebrating the Gifts**

Rooted in the ecumenical movement and in the statement that “war is contrary to the will of God,” Church and Peace welcomed the invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace as the follow-up to the WCC Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–98) and the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–10).

We are journeying with the churches of the ecumenical movement. We celebrate as a crucial step, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the theological paradigm shift from “just war” to “just peace.” In all humility, however, we persist in asking whether the steps the ecumenical movement has made must inevitably lead to the explicit imperative of non-violence—step by step and with all its consequences for the political connectedness of the churches.

We persist in asking this question of our partner organization, the Conference of European Churches. We persist in asking it of the WCC. And we persist in asking ourselves:

- How can we witness credibly, today and in the future, to the fact that for us, non-violence belongs to the core of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- How, in the face of national, European, and international conflicts, can we convince individuals and political actors of the power of non-violence?

We are asking all these questions as once again a brutal war seems to demonstrate the need for increasing military power.

For peace network(s), this war, as with other current worldwide conflicts, once again highlights the urgency of developing broad national and international strategic competencies and resources for non-violent action and civil defence.

For Church and Peace, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace means a worldwide ecumenical commitment to facing these questions in prayer, worship, theological exploration, a sustainable and community orientated lifestyle, concrete action, listening and sharing, solidarity, and challenging one another.

## **Visiting the Wounds**

Below, we share highlights of pilgrimage experiences from some of our annual conferences. The focus is on the spiritual, theological, and political challenges and commitments, in addition to the competencies and experiences of the members of Church and Peace.

### *Long-term effects of war*

The 2015 International Conference of Church and Peace took place at the invitation of a new member, the International Protestant Evangelical Church *Bashkësia e Popullit të Zotit* (Fellowship of the Lord's People) in Pristina, Kosovo/a, under the theme "The Fruit of Righteousness Will Be Peace—Living Together at the Heart of Europe." In one of the workshops, women from Bosnia, Kosovo/a, Macedonia, and Serbia came to the moving realization that they, their mothers, and their grandmothers had had the same experiences in struggling for their own survival and that of their communities. Therefore, they had to engage with the same emotional and structural issues—a first step for healing.

A pilgrimage prior to the conference included visits to places of pain and hope on the journey from Budapest to Belgrade and Pristina—the opposite direction of the refugee routes to western and northern Europe.

Praying for reconciliation and peace on the site of the Battle of Kosovo (1389)—the historical starting point for tensions and violent clashes continuing into the recent past; singing "Dona Nobis Pacem" together with a monk and an imam in the Serbian Orthodox monastery of Decani, guarded by KFOR troops; being warmly welcomed in a mosque and in the

neighbouring Episcopal church in Prizren: these were further way stations on the pilgrimage. In a public event hosted by Church and Peace, Ulrike Lunacek, the Kosovo rapporteur of the European Parliament, called for the use of the peace potential of all religions. Representatives of five religious communities in Kosovo underlined the common task of rebuilding the bridges of tolerance and trust destroyed in the war. This visit painfully brought to our attention the long-term effects of war.

### *Critiquing arms trade and EU military budget decisions*

In 2016, the theme of the Church and Peace gathering in Paris was “Common Security on the Basis of Non-violence and Justice.” Following the General Assembly, members took part in vigils in front of the stock exchange and the exhibition centre on the occasion of the large arms exhibition Eurosatory. They have done so in the years since, while at the same time continuing the constant observation and public critique of the EU budgetary priorities of its Multiannual Financial Framework (2021–27) and its trend towards increased military spending.

In the months leading up to the elections to the European Parliament from 23–26 May 2019, Church and Peace, together with several other organizations, developed a peace policy position checklist in German and English. Church and Peace co-sponsored the campaign “Save the European Peace Project,” which was supported by member organizations and thousands of signatories from 12 countries. After the conclusion of a long period of political decision-making processes regarding the EU budget from then until 2027, a Church and Peace 2021 statement stressed that the funding of arms research and production from the EU budget is a disastrous paradigm shift,<sup>3</sup> and that this together with other decisions calls the European “Peace Project” into question.

### *Migration*

Meeting under a theme based on Psalm 85:10, “Justice and Peace shall Embrace,” the Church and Peace International Conference was held in June 2018, in Hoddesdon, UK. The conference brought together ecumenical pilgrims from Albania to Ireland, and from France to Russia, with the aim of

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3. Church and Peace, “Statement on security policy decisions of the European Union during the German Council EU Presidency,” 25 February 2021. <https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Statement-on-security-policy-decisions-EU-February-2021.pdf>.

“journeying together for reconciliation in a fractured Europe.”<sup>4</sup> The keynote speaker was Rev. Inderjit Bhogal, a Methodist minister. He traced his own pilgrimage of justice and peace from his origins in the Punjab, through Kenya to the UK, where he has worked tirelessly for justice and to build cultures of welcome through the City of Sanctuary movement.

Rev. Bhogal noted that the most crucial issue facing society today is one that runs throughout the Bible, one of journeying and movement: migration. Referring to the teachings of Jonathan Sacks, he underlined that the churches must develop a theology of the sacredness of the other.<sup>5</sup>

A panel shared the experiences of Church and Peace members in their commitment to migrant people and looked at the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace as the path of life, transformation, and healing in the churches. One panellist observed that the “journey is more of a combat than a pilgrimage of encounter or rest. It is a struggle.” Pilgrims must accept their fragility, yet still not let go of hope.

Church and Peace expressed concern at increasingly hostile approaches to the movement of people in the UK and across Europe. Ensuring respect for human rights in Europe requires action at all levels of society and a look at one’s own role in perpetuating injustice, concluded participants at a virtual event in 2020 with a representative from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

### *Racism*

The Britain and Ireland region of Church and Peace hosted several online events to discuss the Black Lives Matter movement, the dismantling of white privileges, and why racism must become a priority for peace churches and peace groups. Members and churches across Europe are taking steps to acknowledge their role and responsibility to actively work against racism and its structural ramifications in our societies. The 2021 International Conference and General Assembly of Church and Peace encouraged the formation of a working group to address this within the network.

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4. Church and Peace, ““Justice and Peace shall kiss each other “ (Psalm 85:10) - Biblical and Ecumenical perspectives”, presentation by the Rev. Inderjit Bhogal, 23 June 2018, [https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Presentation-Biblical-and-ecumenical-perspectives-by-Inderjit-Bhogal\\_2018.pdf](https://www.church-and-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Presentation-Biblical-and-ecumenical-perspectives-by-Inderjit-Bhogal_2018.pdf).

5. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Not in God’s name”, 2015, <https://www.rabbisacks.org/books/not-in-gods-name-confronting-religious-violence/>.

## Images of God and (Non)-Violence

There is a close connection between authoritarian theology and patriarchal images of God, liturgies, and language patterns on the one hand, and degradation, racism, and violence in churches, communities, families, and politics on the other. The participants of the 2021 Church and Peace International Conference concluded that this is a challenge for churches and congregations worldwide who seek to be credible peacemakers.

The conference made a contribution to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other resolutions addressing the protection of women, prevention of violence, and establishment of gender issues in all areas related to peace and security.<sup>6</sup> The participants, from across Europe and beyond, explored manifestations of hierarchy, dominance, oppression, and violence—whether structural, spiritual, or personal. They examined how religious traditions and attitudes are linked to violence, racism, and sexism; how images of God and language are connected; and how language opens up or dictates how we think.

Nicole Ashwood, programme executive of the Just Community of Women and Men programme of the World Council of Churches, made a passionate plea to take seriously the radicality of the biblical statement that God created human beings in God’s image and commissioned them to take care of the whole of creation. Ashwood invited Church and Peace to become part of Thursdays in Black, the global ecumenical campaign to end sexual and gender-based violence, and thereby to take a stand week by week for a world free of violence.

## Steps towards Transforming Injustice

“Visiting the wounds” while rooted in prayer, listening to God’s spirit and to one another, sharing, empathy, and common action pave the way for transformation.

In 2019, Church and Peace marked its 70th anniversary on this journey. Representatives of peace churches, organizations, communities, friends, and guests gathered in Berlin under the theme, “‘I Will Give You a Future and Hope’ (Jeremiah 29:11)—70 Years of Living Nonviolence and Resisting Militarization.” The conference celebrated the network’s past, present, and future. The challenges have changed since the founding era, but peace work is needed just as urgently.

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6. UN Security Council, Resolution 1325, “Women and Peace and Security,” S/Res1325 (31 October 2000), <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>.

The evening programme focused on what is needed for peace in Europe and beyond, and the role churches on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace should play, highlighting the following points.

- Broadening alliances: In times of increasing secularization, we should explore new partnerships in our action for peace and justice and fresh ways to step up our campaigning.
- Climate justice: We are the last generation that can change the course of ongoing climate destruction, so we need to fully commit to the cause with our lifestyles.
- Opposition to nuclear weapons: Seeing the long-term harm and suffering caused by nuclear weapons in the past pushes us as peace churches to increase efforts to protest against nuclear arms and militarization in general.
- Interreligious dialogue and cooperation: Peace churches should play a vital role by being in dialogue with a focus on our common values and commitment to peace.

### **War Is Contrary to the Will of God**

As the final part of our report, we refer to the beginning, the roots of Church and Peace, and to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches Assembly to be held at Karlsruhe, Germany. Church and Peace recently co-sponsored this appeal:

### **War is Contrary to the Will of God<sup>7</sup>**

(First Assembly of the World Council of Churches,  
1948 in Amsterdam)

### **An Appeal for Peace for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches**

- Make use of the public awareness that the WCC assembly will create in the context of your church. Affirm your commitment to Just Peace in Germany, Europe and worldwide, within the Church, the state and society!

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7. Church and Peace, Pax Christi, Mennonitisches Friedenszentrum Berlin, and AGDF, "War Is Contrary to the Will of God: An Appeal for Peace for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches," n.d., [https://www.ohne-ruestung-leben.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/aktion/Appeal-for-Peace-WCC.pdf](https://www.ohne-ruestung-leben.de/fileadmin/user_upload/aktion/Appeal-for-Peace-WCC.pdf).

- In particular, we expect the inviting churches to promote in public and with political decision-makers the calls to:
  - Immediately join the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), in order to ban the most dangerous of all weapons from this world and overcome this permanent threat to humanity
  - Stop exporting arms (especially small and light weapons), because they exacerbate the suffering in the wars of this world and make peaceful negotiations more difficult
  - Redirect the billions spent on military armament each year towards rebuilding societies in ways that mitigate climate change and promote social justice and peace.

## 2.4

### Reconciliation between the Sámi People and the Church of Norway

Kristina Labba

The Sámi Church Council is one of the Church of Norway's central church councils. The Council was established in 1992, which means that we are celebrating 30 years this year. The establishment of the Council marked a shift in the Church of Norway's relation to the Sámi people—the indigenous people of Norway.

During the 1960s and 70s, young Sámi started to feel proud about being Sámi. This came after a long period of Norwegianization conducted by Norwegian state authorities, which forced assimilation into Norwegian society. The Church of Norway was part of this approach. In 1979–81, there were a series of massive protests concerning a construction of a hydroelectric power plant in the Alta River in Sápmi, the territory where the Sámi people traditionally live. Sámi issues—which had not been much noticed before this time, especially on the regional level—started to receive more attention. (Some congregations, however, had already been conducting liturgy in the Sámi languages for many decades, and interpretations in the Sámi languages had been implemented long before the riots.)

With the overall development of Sámi issues in mind, and with inspiration from the 6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Vancouver in 1983, Sámi issues became more important also on the central level. During this period, some church staff members organized a group that started working on possible policies. A few years later, the General Synod of the Church of Norway decided to establish an advisory working group on this topic. With these processes as a basis, the Council was established in 1992.

The Sámi Church Council's tasks include promoting, protecting, and coordinating Sámi church life in the Church of Norway. The regulations of the council stipulate that Sámi church life shall be taken care of as a necessary and equal part of the Church of Norway.

## Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Norway

In 2017 the Norwegian Parliament decided to form a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The background for its establishment is that from the mid-1800s to the end of the 20th century, Norwegian authorities conducted a policy that had serious negative consequences for Sámi, Kven, and Norwegian Finn cultures, languages, identities, and living conditions. This is often referred to as the “Norwegianization policy.”

The TRC started its work in 2018 and will conclude by 1 June 2023, submitting a final report to the President of the Norwegian Parliament. The Commission has three major tasks, summarized here:

- Deliver a historical survey describing the Norwegian authorities’ policy and activities toward the three minority groups: Sámi, Kven, and Norwegian Finns.
- Investigate the effects of the Norwegianization policy.
- Suggest measures that contribute to further reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>

As illustrated here, the mandate of the Norwegian TRC is not focused on, or limited to, the relationship between the Sámi people and the Church of Norway. Instead, the mandate is very broad. Moreover, a TRC focus specifically on the relationship between the Sámi people and the Church of Norway has not been carried out before either.

## Reconciliation without the Majority?

Together with KUN/VID Tromsø, the Sámi Church Council, the National Council, the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, and the Bishops’ Conference in the Church of Norway, held hold a two-day conference in Oslo in May 2022 on the theme of truth and reconciliation.

The conference title was “Reconciliation without the Majority?” It included sessions and address a wide range of topics, such as:

- Practiced-based stories
- Reconciliation as a public responsibility
- A Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace: An ecumenical conversation

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1. English language website of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Norway, [https://uit.no/kommisjonen/mandat\\_en](https://uit.no/kommisjonen/mandat_en).

- Master narratives naturalizing the hierarchy of the Norwegianization policy
- The role and possibilities of civil society in public reconciliation processes.
- Knowledge institutions and truth and reconciliation—situatedness and responsibility.

The conference aimed to attract a wide audience, and the organizers expected people from different organizations in Norwegian society, as well as from the Church of Norway.

## Final Reflections

Reconciliation between the Sámi people and the Church of Norway is an ongoing process. I believe that the establishment of the Sámi Church Council in 1992 is a concrete example of that. Another example is that the Norwegian delegation to the WCC assembly contains an indigenous delegate. A third positive step, which the Church of Norway has taken together with VID Specialized University, is a conference on the theme of truth and reconciliation. The conference initiative also signals that the Church of Norway shows a will to play a central role in the reconciliation process in Norway.

In the Council we are excited for the Norwegian TRC's final report. Although the TRC is not focused on, or limited to, examining the relationship between the Sámi people and the Church of Norway, the Council assumes that the historical Church of Norway and its activities in relation to the Sámi people will be addressed in the final report. The assumption is that it will include references to the Norwegianization process and the negative effects it has had on Sámi languages and Sámi culture and social life. Based on this assumption, we are now looking forward to the conference in May. We hope and believe that the conference will contribute important knowledge, experiences, and ideas to the Council and the Church of Norway's further work with reconciliation, as well as toward the TRC's final report.



## 2.5

### The Irish Churches, the Unfinished Work of Peace, and the Challenge of Brexit

Nicola Brady

The 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement has three strands concerned with relationships within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland, and between the UK and Ireland. The UK's decision to leave the European Union—"Brexit"—upset the delicate balance of relationships held together in that agreement, supported by common EU membership. It brought the question of borders back into politics in Northern Ireland with a predictably destabilizing effect.

One hopeful sign was the fact that from the beginning, Christian churches were clear that they wanted to respond to Brexit together. They worked through ecumenical structures to engage in dialogue with leaders in other sectors, including academia, business, and the community - and voluntary sector. The fact that the ecumenical structures, as well as the member churches, were all-Ireland, cross-border bodies, gave them a valuable perspective and a significant position from which to contribute to civic responses to the challenges posed by Brexit.

#### **Brexit and the Irish Churches: Pastoral Perspectives**

The churches' early conversations within the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) led to the preparation of a framework document that formed the basis for a consultation with local churches and inter-church groups across the island to hear their concerns. The title of the document, *Brexit and the Irish Churches—Pastoral Dimensions* (September 2018), served to underline the fact that the churches' engagement on these questions was non-political. It also emphasized that the challenges posed by Brexit extended beyond the political realm and matters of trade and the economy, with communities already beginning to witness the impact of the resulting uncertainty. In the conclusion of the consultation paper, Bishop Noel Treanor of the Catholic Diocese of Down and Connor (which includes the Belfast area) summarized the approach as follows: "The Churches, espousing no interest other than the common good of the entire human family and a politics responsive to the

issues and culture of our time and our interdependent global condition, have a shared responsibility to create contexts and spaces of encounter, exchange and understanding.”<sup>1</sup>

## **A Time for Courageous and Compassionate Leadership**

The breakdown in political and community relationships was evident in the collapse and prolonged absence of Northern Ireland’s political institutions from 2017. Although Brexit was not the stated reason for the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Executive, increasing polarization around Brexit undoubtedly contributed to a climate of deteriorating relationships and created additional obstacles to efforts to bring parties round the negotiating table. With the British and Irish governments giving priority to the UK-EU negotiations on the Brexit withdrawal agreement, the Church Leaders Group (Ireland) took the initiative in September 2018 to invite the leaders of the largest political parties to meet with them all together to discuss the consequences of the political impasse. The invitations were accepted, and it was the first time the party leaders had all been in the same room for eight months. This encounter led to the churches convening a series of civic dialogue initiatives in different parts of Northern Ireland, bringing together a cross section of civil society leaders with a cross-party panel of politicians. When the official negotiations were reconvened in May 2019, chaired jointly by the British and Irish governments, the Church Leaders Group was invited to share the report from these dialogues, entitled “A Time for Courageous and Compassionate Leadership.”<sup>2</sup> A major recommendation in the report was that civic engagement by political leaders should not be limited to times of emergency:

When politics is broken the responsibility for fixing it does not rest with the politicians alone. Through this process we have seen that those in leadership in civil society are ready to support our politicians in the difficult decisions they face. The community and voluntary sector has managed to continue to provide a vital lifeline to those in need while coping with the policy and funding gaps arising from the absence of Ministers. We need to ensure that this experience and expertise informs and shapes political decision making and that the

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1. Brexit and the Irish Churches—Pastoral Dimensions, consultation paper, produced by the Irish Council of Churches, September 2018.

2. The Church Leaders Group (Ireland), “A Time for Courageous and Compassionate Leadership,” Report on the Church Leaders’ civil society dialogue initiative, September 2018–February 2019.

role of civil society in holding our elected representatives to account is supported and respected.<sup>3</sup>

## **Civic Perspectives on the Brexit Negotiations**

A similar concern was emerging in the churches' collective engagement in relation to Brexit. In November 2018, a consultation event was organized under the auspices of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting to facilitate engagement around the consultation paper mentioned above (*Brexit and the Irish Churches—Pastoral Dimensions*). Participants expressed particular concern about the apparent deterioration in British-Irish relations conveyed in the media coverage of the negotiations, and the impact this was having on community relations at local community level. They concluded that churches needed to challenge themselves about the extent and efficacy of their own engagement in the work of reconciliation, and they also needed to play their part, as civic leaders, to hold political leaders to account for their commitment to the protection of the peace process. Following the event, the Church Leaders Group (Ireland) issued a statement in which they called on political leaders to “weigh their words carefully”: “Regardless of the outcome of this process, as peoples and communities who share this island, we will remain closely related and will have to both get along together and work together in this changing and somewhat uncertain world that lies ahead. This calling will be helped immensely as we all strive to listen and relate to one another in the context of mutual respect and even growing trust, rather than in a divisive and unhealthy atmosphere of needlessly destructive debate and broken and fractured relationships.”<sup>4</sup>

Churches shared with other civic leaders a concern that the UK government and the EU gave so much priority to consultation with the business community in relation to the outworking of Brexit when there was much more at stake than matters of economy and trade. They emphasized that wider civic dialogue was essential to understand the sensitive issues around identity and community relations, in particular.

An open letter from the Irish Inter-Church Meeting in October 2020 made this point: “The Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol follows the Good Friday/

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3. Church Leaders Group, “A Time for Courageous and Compassionate Leadership,” para. 10.

4. “Church Leaders Issue Joint Brexit Statement,” 21 November 2018, posted by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, <https://www.presbyterianireland.org/News/2018-News-Archive/November-2018/Church-leaders-issue-joint-Brexit-statement.aspx>.

Belfast Agreement as an international agreement that will have a defining influence on the future of people in Northern Ireland. We are concerned that the level of engagement with civil society and public awareness raising has not adequately reflected the true significance of this framework.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Treat Our Fragile Peace with Care**

April 2021 brought an outbreak of violence on the streets in parts of Belfast, connected to opposition to the Protocol from those who believed it undermined Northern Ireland’s place in the United Kingdom and the British identity of Northern Ireland’s Unionist community. The Church Leaders Group issued a further open letter, in which they sought to amplify the voices of those doing the front-line, peace-building work at local level. The letter read: “The causes of this most recent outbreak of violence are complex and, in some respects, deep-rooted. Church representatives and other community leaders working on the ground in affected communities have spoken to us of their frustration at seeing another generation of young people risk their lives and their futures because repeated warnings about the need to treat our fragile peace with care went unheeded.”<sup>6</sup>

The Church Leaders Group met with the Chief Constable of the Police Service to express concern for the number of police officers injured in the violence—more than 50 in just one week. They met with representatives of the British and Irish governments and sought to use their position to ensure that high-level political negotiations did not lose sight of the consequences of uncertainty and instability for the lives of people, especially youth, in vulnerable and deprived communities. They also engaged with church leaders from across the UK through Churches Together in Britain and Ireland to share their concerns for the peace process and to emphasize the fact that the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement and the responsibility to protect it belong to everyone in Britain and Ireland.

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5. Irish Inter-Church Meeting, “Open Letter to Political and Civil Society Leaders on Brexit,” 14 October 2020, <https://www.irishchurches.org/news-blog/5438/open-letter-to-political-and>.

6. The full text of this letter can be found in “Church Leaders Plea for Northern Ireland Peace,” *Exaudi Catholic News*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.exaudi.org/church-leaders-plea-for-northern-ireland-peace/>.

## Identity and Belonging—Past, Present, Future

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the Irish Inter-Church Meeting had adopted, as the major theme for its work, “Identity and Belonging—Past, Present, Future.” This was in recognition of the fact the centenaries of the partition of Ireland and establishment of Northern Ireland, which took place in 1921, were likely to be contentious. IICM member churches recognized the potential to deepen the work of reconciliation at this critical moment for the future of Northern Ireland, and for relationships across the UK and Ireland. They recognized too the challenge of countering the powerful polarizing tendencies evident at so many levels in society, with the difficulties exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In January 2021, the members of the Church Leaders Group (Ireland) signalled their intention to embrace the challenge presented by these centenaries in their joint New Year’s Message:

We recognise that people will approach the centenary from a variety of perspectives—for some this is a cause for celebration, others will look upon the last century with a sense of loss and separation. For us, as Church Leaders, the centenary opens up opportunities for greater understanding of each other, for further healing and reconciliation between our communities. This centenary also provides the opportunity for us to reflect together on the failings of relationships and use of violence across the whole island which have marred our past and which in some ways continue to cast a shadow on the present. Mindful of our interconnectedness we recognise our different perspectives on this centenary even among us as Church Leaders. Still we commit ourselves to building a future together in which historic mistrust and division becomes a thing of the past.<sup>7</sup>

This was followed by a statement reflecting on the learning from the conversations taking place within the Church Leaders Group and between the church leaders and political and other civic leaders, as well as in the wider ecumenical structures. Released on St Patrick’s Day, it was entitled “In Christ We Journey Together.” Church Leaders outlined their approach as follows: “Some may struggle with the concept of a shared history when it comes to the centenary of the partition of Ireland, the establishment of Northern

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7. The Church Leaders Group, “Church Leaders’ New Year Message,” press release, 1 January 2021, <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/10328/church-leaders-new-year-message>.

Ireland and the resulting reconfiguration of British-Irish relationships. What is undeniable, however, is the reality that we have to live in a shared space on these islands, and to make them a place of belonging and welcome for all.”<sup>8</sup>

In the statement, church leaders reflect self-critically on the role and leadership of the churches in divided communities and renew their commitment to the work of peace and reconciliation: “As Christian churches we acknowledge and lament the times that we failed to bring to a fearful and divided society that message of the deeper connection that binds us, despite our different identities, as children of God, made in His image and likeness. We have often been captive churches; not captive to the Word of God, but to the idols of state and nation.”<sup>9</sup>

The statement was followed in October that year with an opportunity to reflect on these themes in prayer and worship. A major controversy erupted when the President of Ireland declined an invitation to attend on the basis that he considered it to be “politicised.” It had been hoped that the Irish President would participate alongside Queen Elizabeth II in what was described as “A Service of Reflection and Hope.” In the end neither was present because health issues prevented Queen Elizabeth from travelling. The service was broadcast live by both the British and Irish public service broadcasters and received extensive and very positive coverage in the media. Many commentators appreciated the reflective tone of the event, and especially the fact that the voices of young people were given priority. Most importantly, the service was warmly welcomed by those who were doing front-line peace-building work at local community level.

## The Unfinished Work of Peace

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting has been reflecting on the learning for churches from the ecumenical dialogues, interventions, and initiatives that have taken place in recent years as a contribution to reconciliation. These have been drawn together in a strategic framework entitled “The Unfinished Work of Peace.”<sup>10</sup> The document identifies the priority areas of focus for churches as follows:

- Support for victims

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8. The Church Leaders Group, “In Christ We Journey Together,” press release, 17 March 2021, <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/10492/church-leaders-st-patricks-day>.

9. The Church Leaders Group, “In Christ We Journey Together.”

10. Irish Inter-Church Meeting, “The Unfinished Work of Peace,” <https://www.irishchurches.org/news-blog/5473/99th-annual-meeting-of-the>.

- Collective commemorations and memorialization
- Formal legacy processes and structures
- Tackling paramilitarism
- Shaping a new vision for a shared future

A major focus of this work is the need to better connect what is happening at the senior leadership level with the work of local congregations and faith-based initiatives on the ground, so that each can support and resource the other. High-level interventions by senior leaders can create a valuable space at critical times. They are important for the visibility of the churches working together for peace and the common good—but it is the actions on the ground that have the potential to reach the greatest number of people.

There is much more still to be done if the work of peace and reconciliation is to be deeply embedded at the level of local congregations and achieve its full expression in ecumenical relationships. That said, the work undertaken in recent years has provided encouragement by highlighting the potential role and contribution of the churches to the work of peace.



## 2.6

### Belarus: A Christian Call for Justice and Peace in the Midst of Political Crisis

Natallia Vasilevich

#### **An Era of Crisis as Impulse for Justice and Peace**

There is a political crisis in Belarus in the aftermath of the presidential election in 2020. As in any crisis, the issues of justice and peace are, on the one hand, especially vital. On the other hand, within an authoritarian regime resisting democratic transition, action seeking to further justice and peace is seen as threatening and is therefore suppressed. This leaves little opportunity for anything but underground activity.

When for the short time, church leaders raised their voices in August 2020 against unprecedented violence and torture—the regime’s response to peaceful protestors demanding fair elections—President Lukashenko expressed his dissatisfaction immediately: “I am surprised by the position of our confessions. My dear clergy, settle down and mind your own business! People should come to churches to pray! Churches, churches are not for politics. People should come there with their souls, as it has always been. Don’t go along with the renegades. You will be ashamed and shameful of the position you, some of you, are now taking. And the state will not look at it with indifference.”<sup>1</sup>

This statement was pronounced on 22 August. On 26 August, Metropolitan Pavel (Ponomoryov) of Minsk, the Head of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, was removed from his position by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church “by his own application.” He had previously stated that violence was unacceptable and had also visited survivors of police violence in a hospital. His Catholic counterpart, Metropolitan of Minsk Tadeusz (Kondrusiewicz) was denied entrance into Belarus on his way back from Poland on 31 August; on his 75th birthday in January 2021, he was removed from his position “due to

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1. “Lukashenko: Churches, Churches Are Not for Politics,” *The Church and the Political Crisis in Belarus*, 22 August 2020, <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/lukashenko-cerkvi-kostely-ne-dlya-politiki/>.

retirement.” Another outspoken Belarusian Orthodox hierarch, Archbishop Artemy of Hrodna, who supported the priests of his diocese in their activities for justice and peace, and spoke in a prophetic way against injustice, violence, and the political instrumentalization of the Church, was removed from his position in June 2021 by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church by request of the Synod of the Belarusian Church for “health reasons.”<sup>2</sup>

This special situation of political crisis, lawlessness, and repression made the issues of justice and peace a priority in the civil society. The churches were called to be voices of justice and peace. At the same time, claims for justice and peace were viewed as signs of disloyalty to the regime and therefore very risky. As Reformed theologian Zmicier Chviedaruk stated, this special situation put the church in a predicament, where it had to make “a difficult choice between peaceful silence and risky proclamation.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Peaceful Protest: Not Christian by Name, but Christian in Deed**

In the events prior to the presidential elections, Belarusian churches and many Christians did not advocate for fair elections, democracy, rule of law, or human rights. A limitation on their perceived scope of concerns resulted in their exclusion, or self-exclusion, from public debates on many topics, including climate justice, corruption, human rights, and even freedom of religion. The “culture wars,” as they have played out in Belarus, have associated abortion, sexual freedom, destruction of traditional family, and LGBTQI+ issues with the West. Aleksandr Lukashenko’s regime has been pictured as a paternalistic government defending its people from the West’s bad influence.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Statement of the Christian Vision Group on the Forcible Dismissal of Archbishop Artemy from Governance of the Hrodna Diocese,” *The Church and the Political Crisis in Belarus*, 10 June 2021, <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/archbishop-artemy-hrodna/>.

3. Zmicier Chviedaruk, “Weekly Column from Belarus: Sharing the Gospel with Fellow-Prisoners, 11 February 2022, <https://cne.news/artikel/670-weekly-column-from-belarus-sharing-the-gospel-with-fellow-prisoners>.

4. Natallia Vasilevich, “Going Political? The Involvement of Churches in Public Debates on Prolife Issues in Belarus,” in *Theology and the Political: Theo-political Reflections on Contemporary Politics in Ecumenical Conversation*, ed. Alexei Bodrov and Stephen M. Garret (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2020), 200–27.

Lukashenko has been in power since 1994. In the presidential election of August 2020, he sought to manipulate votes and imprison alternative candidates. The desire for fair elections, rather than any political or ideological agenda, mobilized Belarusians usually far from political activism into protest.

Churches and Christians were not on the front lines of the movement for fair elections, with two exceptions. One month before the elections, a Roman Catholic lay activist, Artiom Tkaczuk, launched the campaign “A Catholic does not participate in stealing elections”—meaning Catholics should not falsify their votes even if under duress. This was supported by many priests all around the country. On the eve of the last day of the elections, a social media flash mob of two dozen Belarusian Orthodox priests and officials sent out the message that “the Orthodox are against stealing votes, humiliation, and pressure on the individual.”

The nights of 9–12 August seemed to become a point of no return. There was police violence against peaceful protesters in many cities and town all over the country. In the midst of a media blockade, several protestors were murdered, and thousands underwent torture and other inhumane treatment. In the shock of this unprecedented violence, the protests didn’t vanish, but started to grow. They included more and more types of protests, like chains of solidarity with flowers, singing on the streets, drinking tea in the neighbourhoods, and praying together ecumenically. That was the starting point of the nationwide protest, in which, for the first time in recent history, the participation of Christians and churches became very visible. The experience of blatant falsifications and violations during the election, and police violence against peaceful protestors in its aftermath, motivated church leaders, priests, and lay people into spontaneous pro-democratic engagement, from which previously they had been rather alienated.

The fact that people responded to the violence with flowers and chanting, smiles and humour, and prayers and art, is remarkable. Political prisoner Paval Sieviaryniets, one of the Orthodox faithful, described it in a letter from prison: “They are against us with berets, and we respond to them with hearts.”<sup>5</sup> It was not churches who initiated this kind of peaceful protest, but its spiritual value recognized by Christians. After these dark nights, women dressed in white and holding flowers and smiling went to the centre of the

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5. Paval Sieviaryniets, quoted by Belarusian Christian Democracy, Facebook, 26 April 2021, <https://m.facebook.com/bchdparty/photos/a.606949899440627/2170584083077193/?type=3>.

cities, and for a time, the violence seemed to be overcome. Roman Catholic bishop Yuri Kasabutsky recognized, that even if the action was not Christian by name, it was Christian in essence:

You took the flowers, you came out, you stood, you showed the whole world what confused everyone—in our country and in all other countries. You came out, you started waving these flowers. Your smiles, your smiles—you just amazed everyone, everyone was shocked. . . . You came out and you began defeating evil with good. . . . After all, if you went out and started fighting, struggling, it would not bear fruit. It has borne fruit because you came out and you overcame this evil with your goodness. You may not have known that but you defeated the devil with your goodness; the devil was also confused and did not know what to do next.<sup>6</sup>

However, this commitment to a peaceful, democratic, and lawful approach, to non-violence over violence, dialogue over revolution, new fair elections in pursuit of legitimate demands over forceful seizure of power didn't result in a democratic transition or in a reign of peace and justice in the country. Exposed and defenceless against authoritarian power and violence, the Belarusian people failed to overturn the authoritarian regime. Moreover, they “have had to pay a very high price—the price of blood, wounds, traumas, tears, imprisonment, exile, insecurity, injustice, and, finally, the price of time.”<sup>7</sup>

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the leader of the Belarusian democratic movement and the candidate who opposed Lushenko in the 2020 election, lamented this in an open letter to Pope Francis, inspired by his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*:

How much longer do we have to go down this path? How many more will be arrested, fired from their workplaces, beaten and expelled from the country, before our voice is heard by the authorities? Who will help us stand up and heal our wounds? Who will help us restore justice? . . . Will the voice of the Church and the voice of the people

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6. Natallia Vasilevich, “The Vatican Reactions to the Belarusian Crisis,” *The Church and the Political Crisis in Belarus*, 20 December 2021, <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/vatican-reactions-to-belarusian-crisis/>.

7. Natallia Vasilevich, “Christians in the Struggle for Justice in Belarus,” reflections shared at the Extraordinary Virtual General Assembly (V-GA) of the World Student Christian Federation, 30 July 2021, <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/christians-in-the-struggle-for-justice-in-belarus/>.

be able to break through the armoured windows of cars, through the shields of the police, through the disabled Internet?<sup>8</sup>

## The Failure of Democratic Transition; Seeking Justice under Oppression

The question remained unanswered by the Holy Father and by the events that played out. Indeed, despite the unprecedented engagement of Belarusians across the country in peaceful protests, the movement failed to launch democratic changes. Churches failed to play a role in resolving the crisis. Instead of launching a democratic transition, civil activism provoked a huge wave of repression in 2020–21. The space for legal and safe operation rapidly shrank, the registration of many NGOs was withdrawn, and independent media were designated as extremist and closed down. There has been large-scale persecution of human rights activists, bloggers, academics, professionals, and also of church leaders and believers who have raised their voices against violence and for democratic changes.

For his part, Lukashenko announced 2021 to be a year of “national unity.” This reinterprets the concept of peace as the absence of all protest, as a return to the pre-election status quo.

There are more than 1000 people currently being held as political prisoners, including several dozen Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical believers. Among them is a mother of five children, Catholic activist, and volunteer Volha Zalatar, who was sentenced to four years in prison. In her last words in court, she referred to Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, saying: “I’m here because I am a caring person. I am here because I live by God’s commandments. I’m here because I am a mom who wants to protect her children.”<sup>9</sup>

Among the Catholic faithful was ecological activist Vitold Ashurok, who was arrested after publicly praying the rosary and who died in prison under suspicious circumstances.<sup>10</sup> The Orthodox priest Siarhei Rezanovich, his

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8. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, “Fraternal Society: A Vision For a New Belarus,” letter to the Holy Father Francis, Bishop and Pope of Rome, inspired by his new encyclical *Fatelli tutti*, accessed 20 April 2022, <https://tsikhanouskaya.org/en/events/news/f46df99254de4dd.html>.

9. “Volha Zalatar’s Final Speech in Court,” The Church and the Political Crisis in Belarus, 1 December 2021, <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/volha-zalatars-final-speech-in-court/>.

10. “Statement of the Christian Vision Group of the Coordination Council Regarding the Death in the Škloŭ Prison of a Political Prisoner Vitold Ashurak,” The Church and the

wife Liubou, and their son Pavel, were accused of terrorism. The Orthodox believer Mikalai Vitsikau wrote a letter to local newspaper in support of the call for a nationwide discussion of the new constitution, and was arrested and detained.<sup>11</sup> The Reformed intellectual and philosopher Uladzimir Matskevich was arrested and detained in August 2021; his works are now under examination for extremism, and he had to go on a hunger strike to raise awareness of his case.<sup>12</sup> A religious community was forbidden to sing the traditional hymn “Almighty God”; an Orthodox believer was arrested for lighting a memorial candle in a window on the anniversary of the murder of Raman Bandarenka (a young activist and Orthodox believer beaten to death by security forces in the yard of his house).<sup>13</sup>

Churches, religious communities, religious leaders, and activists experience both external pressure from the regime and internal pressure from their religious institutions. Even the priests and employees of churches and church-related initiatives who were previously outspoken have become less visible since the end of 2021—or have had to flee the country. Leaders loyal to the regime have been installed in some churches. Priests are generally forbidden to preach on “political matters,” and communities may not sing certain prayers and hymns, as they could be interpreted as political and result in persecutions.

As a result, Christian communities and Christians have either fled the country or act underground. Thousands of other people have undergone arrest, detention, and torture. The constant risk of imprisonment, as well as forced migration, has destroyed the institutional basis of the democratic movement in Belarus.

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Political Crisis in Belarus, 22 May 2021, <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/vitold-ashurak/>.

11. “Statement of the Christian Vision Working Group of the Coordination Council on the Persecution of Mikalai Vitsikau, Orthodox Christian,” *The Church and the Political Crisis in Belarus*, 22 January 2022, <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/statement-of-christian-vision-mikalai-vitsikau/>.

12. “Statement by the Coordinating Council’s Christian Vision Working Group on the Hunger Strike of Christian Intellectual Uladzimir Matskevich, *The Church and the Political Crisis in Belarus*, 9 February 2022, <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/tag/uladzimir-mackevich/>.

13. Updates on the persecution of Christians in this political crisis can be found at this webpage of *The Church and the Political Crisis in Belarus*: <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/monitoring/>.

## Christian Vision for Belarus

Despite all the risks and challenges, Belarusian Christians and churches continue their struggle for justice and peace. In prayer chats, in informal groups of friends, in professional ecclesiastic communities, like associations of Orthodox choir conductors or Protestant pastors, the discussions continue. Christian opinion leaders speak on social networks “only for friends,” in letters from prison, or from forced exile.

In September 2020, as a kind of starting point for different initiatives, the group Christian Vision was formed by ordained ministers, theologians, and Christian activists of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Anglican, and Evangelical churches. They spontaneously came together to pray, to reflect, to help, to monitor, and to act in response for the political crisis. The group has a profound ecumenical character.

The mission of the Christian Vision Group is to empower “Christians and churches to become a prophetic voice in the society and to contribute to the democratic process, restoration of the rule of law, justice and genuine peace, as well as to facilitate national dialogue and understanding.”<sup>14</sup>

It is not by accident that the group insists on the adjective *genuine* while speaking about peace. The concept of peace has been abused both by authoritarian politicians and by church leaders instrumentalizing theological ideas to justify injustice and violence. Words and concepts are twisted: the notions of love and care can mask the pursuit of control; “protection of traditional values” can act as a cover for human rights violations; the notion of “social justice” can disguise excessive engagement by the state into all domains of social life and suppression of anything independent; repression is justified by “security”; and oppression is dubbed “unity.”

A great common critical theological work is needed to examine not only the lived experience, but also theological language and concepts, to distinguish the many faces of injustice and oppression that are often hidden behind intentions and practices which look and sound good, but which are anything but. In this theological work, voices from other contexts can serve as a ray of light, aiding the discernment between genuine and false justice and peace.

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14. “The Mission of the Christian Vision Group in the Current Political Crisis in Belarus,” The Church and the Political Crisis in Belarus, 26 January 2022, <https://belarus2020.churchby.info/the-mission-of-the-christian-vision-group-in-the-current-political-crisis-in-belarus/>.



## 2.7

### Youth Perspectives on the Challenges of Churches in Europe and the Global Ecumenical Movement

Vilma Saarinen

I am one of the three delegates nominated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland to represent it in the forthcoming 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, Germany. I am a 28-year-old youth pastor, currently working in the second-largest parish in Finland, located in the region of South Ostrobothnia in western Finland. Enabling and encouraging youth participation has been very close to my heart for years. I have also promoted this development target within my own church and through the Ecumenical Council of Finland. In what follows I will share some of my thoughts, especially from the perspective of youth participation.

There are many challenges, but I will pinpoint five priorities here.

Firstly, we should reflect on what it means to be an inviting church. My church is a national church: approximately 67 % of Finns are baptized members. Older generations see that the church has an important cultural value, but in the view of younger generations, it is just a faceless institution. How can churches provide examples of Christians and Christian lifestyles that young people can relate to? How can we be Christians and Christian communities in the public arena—for example on social media—presenting our true faces to the world? A personal touch is needed.

Secondly, showing our faces and supporting a cause is not an easy task due to the deepening disagreements around the world. Hate speech has also found its way into my church, especially between the so-called liberals and conservatives. These terms are widely used although they are very problematic because they define people and communities too narrowly. According to surveys, youth would like to influence society. At the same time, they tend to avoid expressing their own opinions, especially in conflicts; they seek the company of like-minded people because they are afraid of the negative responses they might receive from others. One may be targeted, shamed, and harassed by trolls on the internet not because of any outrageous behaviour, but simply because of one's opinions. If this trend continues, we will face

more crises of democracy. Maybe one of our priorities should be—again—to work for peace.

Thirdly, the past few years have been exceptionally difficult for the youth. This is directly related to issues of justice and peace. We have seen a surge of problems related to mental health. There are many youth who are not reached by school staff, social services, parish priests, or youth workers. Youth are suffering because of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the violence that they see on social media. The number of those contacting Finland's main help chat for youth doubled on Thursday, 24 February 2022, the day Russian forces attacked Ukraine. On that day every fourth chat discussion was related to the war. Youth suffer from a lack of hope, especially in relation to social and global issues. At the same time, we have fewer helping hands to deliver the help needed. Due to the hard times we are living through, we have turned inwards. For example, we have fewer volunteers in my parish than we used to have. The former volunteers have said that they themselves have too much on their plates in running their own daily lives. How to be a voice of hope in this world? We should remember that youth give more value to action than words. Even symbolic acts are far more important than empty words.

Fourthly, I would like to highlight the importance of involving younger generations in the ecumenical movement. In the early phases and previous decades of the movement there were many young adults interested in ecumenism. They travelled and spent time together and gained experiences of communion with Christians from traditions very different than their own. Later, some even became bishops in their own churches. Nowadays it is very difficult to get that experience without having already achieved a high rank in one's own church. How do we train the next generation to take responsibility in the ecumenical movement and its various platforms? We should consider lay expertise. The ecumenical movement cannot be left as a "playground" for the few enthusiastic theologians—we desperately need the experience not just of all age-groups but also of people from all walks of life. And since not everyone can participate in gatherings like the WCC assemblies, one of our priorities should be to support ecumenism at the grassroots level, so that there are more meaningful roles to play in our movement.

The fifth and last challenge I want to point to here is the need for resources. We have seen in my own church cuts in financial support for ecumenical work. Due to these cuts, we have to prioritize what we do and how we do it. During the last two years, we have learned to use more technology to communicate,

but that does not fully replace meeting face to face. The pandemic has forced youth to create new ways to share their lives with their friends. Could the youth innovate new ways to come together as an ecumenical movement? If ecumenism is understood as something extra that churches do, over and above their everyday work, it easily ends on the top of the list when cutting expenses. Therefore, it is necessary that as churches we remind ourselves that coming together is our identity, not something extra.



## 2.8

### Justice, Peace, and National Identity in Scotland

Doug Gay

It has rarely been more important for churches throughout the world to engage in effective theological reflection on questions of national identity. Work in this area, however, is often limited by underdeveloped theological frameworks that mirror established left-right frameworks of legitimation or denunciation.

As a theologian working on these questions, I believe that a political theology of national identity should (and always will) be shaped by our theologies of creation, sin, redemption, and the eschaton. It needs to be a theology for the whole *oikumene* which affirms God's love for the entire world. As this, it affirms the insight of Lamin Sanneh that all human languages and cultures are valuable and that "God has no favourites." As a Reformed theologian, I read this somewhat traditionally through a doctrine of human stewardship of creation, noting how Timothy Gorringer cites Barth's formulation of culture as, under God, "the human task."<sup>1</sup> Human stewardship requires that we show appropriate concern for what is local and indigenous, valuing cultural diversity as expressing a mix of creational and providential goods.

But staying with Barth, theologies of nationalism must be post-Barmen, refusing idolatrous, fascistic, racist, and imperialist accounts of national identity. Barmen moves us towards specifically Christocentric accounts of national identity, adding a catholic ecclesiology to an ecumenical anthropology, and anticipating an eschatology in which the new creation is a joyful communion of every people, group, language, and nation.<sup>2</sup>

The theological task can therefore be clarified here, submitting our own local identity and allegiance to the guiding ethico-theological principles of the equality of a single humanity and the catholicity of Christ's one church. Rather than effacing national identity, however, we are called to the human

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1. Gorringer, in "Conversing with Barth", Routledge, 2004, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315259307-3/culture-barbarism-barth-amongst-students-culture-timothy-gorringer>.

2. Post-Barmen, referring to the Barmen Declaration of 1934.

work of faithful stewardship of our own cultural identities (which are often hybrid, “mongrel,” and overlapping) alongside joyful recognition of our neighbour’s cultural and national identities. Rather than demonizing advocacy of national identity, each national project, whether existing or aspiring, must be continually subjected to a *metanoia* in which its claims are tested by interpreting the word of God and discerning the Spirit of God. A threefold “baptismal” renunciation is required of all national identities: renouncing “the world,” that is, *imperialism* (domination/superiority); “the flesh,” that is *essentialism* (ethnic purity); and “the devil,” that is *absolutism* (idolrous national allegiances). In Christian terms, this represents a “discipling” of national identities in relation to our call to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, rather than simple denunciation or idealization.

The brief sketch above represents my own position and not the official position of my church, the Church of Scotland. My theological thinking has evolved in a contextual dialogue with the stance of the Kirk since the 1980s and I believe the example of Scotland and the experience of the Church of Scotland offers some valuable insights for the global church.

The Church of Scotland is a classic case of secular, modern academic studies of nationalism, whether it (nationalism) is best understood as a primordial or modern phenomenon. I lean towards the judgment of Adrian Hastings that English and Scottish national identities—while both stand in need of thorough historicization and demythologization—were established in pre-modern times.<sup>3</sup> The two realms of England and Scotland, alongside Wales and Ireland, coexisted with something close to their current territorial boundaries in the 16th century. While the dominant political elites in both adhered to the Protestant Reformation, their adherence took on episcopal form in England and presbyterian form in Scotland. This duality was provided for in both the 1603 unification of the Crowns under James VI of Scotland and in the 1707 treaty of parliamentary union of England and Scotland—the foundation of the existing United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The 1707 union state was therefore a multi-national state from its inception, making specific provision for continuing national distinctiveness in relation to the established churches (Anglican in England; Presbyterian in Scotland), legal systems (English law in England; Scots law in Scotland) and educational establishments.

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3. Adrian Hastings, “The Construction of Nationhood”, Cambridge University Press, 2012

Although there were wars between (and within) England and Scotland in both the 16th and 17th centuries, the two unions of 1603 and 1707 were peacefully negotiated between the respective parliaments and were not imposed by England as a result of war or invasion. These unions can be seen to add an additional strand of “British” national identity to the existing mix. British identity in the 18th and 19th centuries fuelled and was fuelled by an accelerating imperialism, key components of which were participation in the transatlantic slave trade and colonization of the Caribbean and global South by violent military invasion and subjugation. Scotland played a full part in this and was an active and willing partner in the project of the British Empire and in the many Christian missionary enterprises that accompany empire. These violent and intrinsically racist features of British/English/Scottish identity developed in ironic and at times demonic tension with more positive liberal democratic ideals; although well into the mid-20th century, these continued to be seen in nativist terms as domestic entitlements rather than truly universal values. Intra-union nationalist sentiment remained relatively dormant in Scotland and Wales throughout the 19th century but was stirred up in Ireland by the brutality and callousness of British rule.

In every decade of the 20th century, there were forces and events that disrupted and reconstructed British/English and Scottish identity: the (continuing) migration of Irish Roman Catholics to Scotland; the decline of the British Empire; the First World War; the transition to democratic governance based on universal enfranchisement of women and men; rebellion against the British state in Ireland leading to “partition” and the establishment of the Irish Free State; the beginnings of decolonization; the Second World War; the creation of the British welfare state; the creation of the UN; the rapid progress of decolonization and state creation; a significant increase in immigration to the UK, particularly England, from former colonial territories in the Caribbean and the global South; and the eventual accession of the UK to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973.

A number of these developments are normally associated with a strengthening of “British identity” within the UK, in particular, the two world wars, in which citizens from all four national entities served together in the British Armed Forces, and the creation of the British welfare state. This draws attention to the way in which national identities are not static, but can wax and wane, combine and overlap. This is also true in complex ways for those who moved to the United Kingdom throughout the 20th century and forged new hyphenated and hybrid identities that challenged and expanded the

scope of dominant British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish identities, particularly in relation to racialized conceptions of ethnicity.

Subsequent to the departure of the 26 counties in Ireland from the UK, continuing Irish nationalist disaffection with “British rule” in Northern Ireland saw contested patterns of identification among citizens there as Irish or British, which led to the onset of “the Troubles” in 1968, as Irish Republican and Protestant Unionist paramilitaries engaged in violent clashes with one another and the forces of the UK state, one side seeking a United Ireland and the other defending the Northern Irish counties remaining within the union state. The entry of the UK into the EEC in 1973, saw the UK sit alongside Ireland as coequals.

The 1920s saw an awakening of Scottish cultural and artistic identity. It also witnessed some racist/sectarian stances from the Church of Scotland in response to Irish Catholic immigration and state support for Roman Catholic education in Scotland. Scottish national sentiment did not translate into significant momentum towards a political nationalism until the late 1960s, when the Scottish National Party won a seat in Parliament. Further gains were made in the 1974 election, fuelled by the discovery of oil in Scottish waters in the North Sea and the entry of the UK into the EEC. A new narrative began to emerge which combined three things: a case for economic sustainability; a new slogan of “Independence within Europe,” which argued for Scotland (like Ireland) becoming a member of the EEC/EC in its own right; and a rejection of what was seen as a democratic deficit in the Westminster “union” Parliament (where Scots voted in a majority of Labour MPs, but mostly saw an English Conservative majority lead to Conservative governments being formed). Alarmed by rising support for nationalism, a proposal for limited devolution was put to a referendum in 1979 and won a majority but failed to reach a legal threshold for implementation.

The Church of Scotland, having rowed back from its extremist outbursts in the 1920s, had since the 1940s engaged cautiously with expressions of interest in greater devolution of powers to Scotland. The Church was seen as a key stakeholder and influential presence within Scottish civil society, so when the UK state began to establish more formal methods of consultation and enquiry in the early 1970s, the Kirk was represented on the state commission. The General Assembly gave a broad welcome to the modest proposals for further administrative devolution on offer. This began a pattern that persisted from the mid-1970s to 2012 of majority support within the General Assembly for greater devolution of powers within the United Kingdom.

Following the failure of the 1979 referendum, the Kirk in the 1980s became a key formal participant in the Scottish Constitutional Convention, a cross-party and civil society movement to secure a Scottish Parliament, working alongside trade unions and voluntary sector groups. This process culminated in the production of *A Claim of Right for Scotland* in 1989 which called for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. The rhetoric here was theologically and ecclesiologically significant, reflecting two previous Claims of Right supported by the General Assembly in 1689 and 1842. It was during the 1980s that more significant theological reflection began to be done within Scotland and the Church of Scotland on questions of national identity. Here, Rev. Dr Will Storrar was a key figure seeking to develop a reformed and ecumenical case for greater political and institutional recognition of Scottish identity. While the General Assembly voted by a majority in support of this line, influential voices such as Rev. Prof. Thomas Torrance issued sharp warnings about the dangers of nationalism.

Devolution came to be seen as the settled will of the Scottish people and a second referendum was convincingly won in 1997, leading in 1999 to the re-establishment of a Scottish Parliament as a devolved legislature within the United Kingdom. The existence of the parliament has come to be seen as a positive and permanent feature of the constitutional landscape, retaining the support of a majority of the Scottish public. The Church of Scotland was an active and supportive participant in the civic processes of deliberation and campaigning leading to the establishment of the parliament. This is where the Church's formal support for constitutional change was paused until 2016, when the General Assembly adopted a pro-Remain position in the UK's Brexit referendum.

Prior to that, the creation of the Scottish parliament, rather than killing off demands for full independence, had led to a significant growth in support for that option. While Conservative Party support had been declining in Scotland since the 1970s, the post-1950s dominance of the UK Labour Party in Scottish politics was eroded with remarkable speed following the creation of the parliament. The Scottish National Party (SNP) was the major beneficiary of changing patterns of allegiance, rapidly winning seats in the Scottish Parliament to form a minority administration in 2007 and then, against all odds, a majority in 2011. This allowed the SNP to claim that they had a mandate for an independence referendum. Given the decisive majority they had won, the Conservative government in London, which retains jurisdiction over constitutional questions, gave permission for an official referendum to

be held in 2014.

The Church of Scotland took a more cautious approach in the lead-up to the referendum. Recognizing that church members, as well as the wider electorate, were deeply divided on the issue, the Kirk opted to remain neutral on the central issue and concentrated on seeking to enable healthy, civil, and productive debate. The General Assembly agreed not to hold a debate on the substantive question, instead hosting a special session of constructive dialogue in which speakers were invited to advocate for the YES and NO positions. Comment and questions were allowed in the debate that followed, but no vote was taken at the end.

Another way in which the Church of Scotland was active was in the promotion of local “hustings.” This is already a common practice at General (i.e. UK), Scottish, and local elections, with local church premises offering a non-aligned space in which candidates from all parties can gather to address and be questioned by local voters. Finally, the Church magazine also published articles from advocates of union and independence as well as letters from readers.

The independence campaign was passionate, divisive, and intensely engaging. It divided congregations, families, and friendship groups, and generated very high levels of interest and concern, as well as very high turnout on the day of the (non-compulsory) vote. There were fierce debates about the impartiality or lack thereof from the BBC, which was a particularly important media source given that 90 percent of the print media advocated a NO vote. The NO (“Better Together”) campaign won the referendum 55 to 45 percent. Winners were elated; losers were dejected, even heartbroken and, in some cases, angry about media bias and representation. The Church of Scotland called for a moment of national reconciliation on the Sunday after the vote and in many congregations, members who had voted in opposite ways took part in a ritual of candle lighting and prayer for reconciliation and healing. One politician complained that this was not appropriate, given that the campaign had been civil, peaceful, and non-violent, but my sense is that within congregations it was broadly appreciated.

Analysis of voting patterns showed clear demographic trends towards a NO vote among older voters and a YES vote among younger voters. Due to the prevalence of older voters in church congregations, it is likely that 60–70 percent of Church of Scotland members voted NO. Given this weighting and the fact that most theologians and church leaders believed a theological case

could be made for voting on either side, the Kirk's decision to remain neutral and support a healthy and informed debate seems well judged. Although this may seem like a soft option, trying to advocate for a fair and open debate on an extremely divisive, high stakes issue was in fact a highly political move, given how fiercely each side was disputing the other side's "facts," "evidence," and claims.

The Church of Scotland did express support for remaining in the European Union during the subsequent Brexit referendum in 2016. Given that over 62 percent of Scots voted "remain," that again seems like a well-judged position to have taken. The likelihood here is that more than 50 percent of Kirk members also voted to remain the EU, despite their older demographic.



## **Appendices**

Included here are documents and statements associated with the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, selected WCC communications regarding issues of justice and peace in Europe, and statements and correspondence from the WCC between January and March 2022 in connection with the situation in Ukraine.



## Appendix A

### An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Approved by the WCC central committee, meeting in Geneva,  
Switzerland, July 2014:

“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

### **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.

### **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.

### **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 imperilled. 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.

## **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.

## **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.

## 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!

## Appendix B

### “The Future We Want – Life, not Destruction”

#### The Message from Mainz – German Ecumenical Assembly 2014

For decades the ecumenical process for “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” has found expression in a number of Ecumenical Assemblies. The recent appeal from the Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan in 2013 which called for a seven years’ “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace” encouraged more than 500 people from Austria, Switzerland, Germany and other countries, many of them committed experts in their respective fields, to meet in Mainz, Germany, from 30 April to 4 May 2014. In many workshops, lectures, open space breaks and public hearings we discussed the actual problems caused by the capitalist organization of our economies and of our lives. We agree with Pope Francis when he writes: “Such an economy kills”. We are in search of and struggling for a new approach to an “Economy of Life”.

#### **Aspects of Justice Today**

People are still suffering under the constraints caused by inequality and hunger in spite of the fact that there is enough available for all. Therefore, we call:

- for a world wide solidarity to secure the basic needs (Grundbedürfnisse) for everyone
- for the reduction of the differences in income and personal wealth
- for a just access to all resources for present and future generations
- for the exclusive right of democratic public authorities to create money.

#### **Aspects of Peace Today**

People are being held captive by a devastating spiral of power which dominates the patterns of their socio-cultural and economic behaviour. Therefore, we call:

- for an immediate stop to the export of weapons

- for a staggered reduction of our involvement in military organizations and activities
- for the recognition of non-violent communication and civilian solutions of conflicts

## **Aspects of Protection and Integrity of Creation Today**

Humankind which thinks of itself as being the “crown of creation” (Schöpfung) has become the “crown of exhaustion” of the world (Erschöpfung). Therefore, we call:

- for the rejection of the dogma of continuous economic growth
- for an end to the exploitation of the world’s resources (nature and humankind)
- for the recognition of the ecological diversity of all cultures

## **Therefore, we are convinced of the necessity for a great and joint transformation of our socio-economic systems and lifestyles.**

The following text explains these main theses in further details.

“No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other: or he will respect the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Mt.6,24)

We consider ourselves as an ecumenical grass roots movement and see ourselves in a situation which asks for decisions like those for which Jesus called 2000 years ago (Mt.6). Today, we translate the Aramaic word “mammon” as “capital”, and we believe that the critical moment (Kairos) for a fundamental acknowledgment the need for responsible action has come. Our present model of civilization is challenged because of its social, ecological and economic effects. Early Jewish prophets, representatives of other world religions, and Jesus of Nazareth took a public stand on this, and so we join together with all to whom justice, peace and the protection of creation is a serious concern world wide.

## **Vision (Via Positiva)**

The ecumenical movement is a vital process in our world today. It finds its expression in manifold local, regional and international groups

and institutions. We continue to work towards our aims, encouraged and strengthened by the grace and power of God, in the face of increasingly serious crises in the last 30 years and in spite of the mantras saying that there are no alternatives to the official policies.

The vision of the Kingdom of God and of Shalom, Buen Vivir, Sangsaeng, Humanitas and Ubuntu give us an idea of the world as we would want it to be.

## **Scandal (Via Negativa)**

Often we miss the support of the leaders of our churches. In international gatherings, criticism of the existing situation deepens and alternative scenarios and proposals are worked out. In spite of the huge amount of critical knowledge about the dangerous situation in which large parts of the world and growing groups of the population in our countries have to live, these alternative concepts play only a minor role in the everyday lives of decision makers and of most people.

We contradict, therefore, the conclusions of the recent joint declaration of the leaders of the German Protestant Churches (EKD) and the German Catholic Bishops' Conference; their paper accepts the neoliberal social system with a slight ecological touch. We declare that for ethical and ecological reasons we cannot accept our present socio-economic model and the economic system as practiced.

The lives of our people are dominated by a capitalistic logic of accumulation and growth which

has become a "state religion" and controls large parts of our everyday lives. Many of us understand that we profit from this system, yet we allow ourselves to be used to legitimize this system and do not realize the damage it does to others.

In living this way, we become guilty of serious crimes against large parts of humankind. Our failure finds its expression in many ways:

- in the exploitation and misuse of our connatural world (Mitwelt);
- in social polarization (e.g. large numbers of people die of hunger, whereas large quantities of food are wasted or destroyed);
- in the exclusion of disadvantaged people or those who are being discriminated;

- in the rejection of refugees seeking protection in our regions of wealth and liberty (“Fortress Europe”), and
- in arms production and armed conflicts to serve our economic targets, and largely financed by the taxpayers.

## **Challenge and Change (Via Transformativa)**

### *What Can Churches Do?*

The assembly in Mainz has again brought home to us how important is cooperation and joint effort of all the groups in our churches who are working on alternative ways of thinking and living. The present reality of the “Good Life” for few has to be confronted with a new reality of the “Good Living Together” of all people.

The ecumenical movement, therefore, should promote a fundamental transformation on the social, ecological, economic and political level – as propagated in Busan in 2013. In working for this transformation we can rely not only on the wealth of biblical traditions, but also on those in other philosophies and religions. We want to work for radical changes in our present civilization and its values, for active compassion for all people, for respect for all life, for the protection and healing of creation, and for non-violence in personal as well as international conflicts. The disturbed relations between people, between humans and nature, between past and future cannot be overcome by developments that deepen divisions, but only by creating a world-wide community of “Good Living Together”.

Our parishes can become places of transformation, workshops for social and ecological initiatives and non-violent communication. Pilgrims on the way of learning to practice justice, peace and the integrity of creation need such places of retreat and experimentation. Therefore, we are all called to engage in projects of reconstruction inspired by the Pauline concept of “oikodome”, since each building project and each section on our pilgrimage can only be accomplished jointly. At present, we are walking on an important section of this Via Transformativa. Let us go on and walk it in solidarity with our society.

### *What Can Civil Society Do?*

We reject the notion of a “market based democracy” (cit. Chancellor Merkel); instead, we support a “democracy based economy” and the abolition of all oligarchic structures. We need an economy in conformity with our

constitutions. In our Constitutions the basic values of cooperation and the common good are enshrined and not those of competition, exploitation and profit orientated enrichment.

The concept of an “economy of solidarity” (Solidarische Ökonomie) is based on the two principles of “cooperation instead of competition” and “meaning instead of gaining” (Sinn statt Gewinn). These principles, enlarged by the idea of an economy orientated towards the common good lead to concrete political demands. The present system of private money creation has to be transferred to the public sector and controlled by democratic rules. Each credit should be evaluated according to its contribution to the common good; thus, the total amount of money creation will be linked to progress in the direction of an economy of solidarity oriented towards the common good. In this context we should acknowledge the biblical ban on taking interest and the prophetic denunciation of speculation with food products.

A further concrete demand on this pilgrimage is the liberation of all people world-wide from the constraints of hunger, disease and the lack of chances for developing themselves.

Therefore, we advocate a universal guarantee of human security (Grundsicherung) which includes access to food, clean water, habitation, health care, education, and regional mobility as human commons (Gemeingüter) for all people. This could be organized by local and regional non-profit cooperatives as examples show world-wide. A church parish could locally set such an example.

This is a concrete alternative to the illusions of the capitalist economy. An “economy of solidarity” with decentralized administration can not only achieve food self sufficiency, but also energy sovereignty on the basis of renewable and sustainable energy resources. Particularly with respect to the necessary reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> to 2 t per person and year, and the limitation of climate change to 2 degrees, it is important that we make substantial progress in energy sufficiency (responsible consumption) and energy subsistence (production by end users). We therefore believe in the necessity of an industrial “disarmament” (a substantial reduction in industrial production world wide).

Against this background, we reject the transatlantic free trade partnership agreements which are currently being discussed (TTIP for EU – USA, and CETA for EU – Canada). They must be prevented by widespread and strong protests from civil society and lobby work, since they would jeopardize all the standards of an economy in the service of life which have already been

achieved or are still being pursued. We, therefore, support the campaigns of civil society, e.g. that of the alliance “Unfairhandelbar” (unfair negotiable), which advocates that the forthcoming European elections be used as a vote against TTIP and CETA. We need structures that facilitate fair trading and are orientated towards ecological, social and peace-promoting policies.

We suggest that the Ecumenical Network in Germany (Ökumenisches Netz in Deutschland) invites all interested groups engaged in working towards the great transformation of society, such as trade unions, social movements and all initiatives, for a strategy conference.

We object strongly to the military involvement of the Federal Republic of Germany and of all other countries. Participants in our Ecumenical Assembly 2014 proposed setting up a working group composed of experts in civil conflict management, development cooperation, alternative economic and ecological sciences and of the peace movement. Their aim should be to draw up a concept for a military phase-out, i.e. peacekeeping and responsibility to protect without military means. This concept is to be publicly discussed. A ban (Ächtung) of the threat or the use of military force in conflicts is a precondition for eventually reaching valid agreements based on international law for the protection of the global climate and a fair global economy. Such a ban is also the prerequisite for the long overdue termination of the scandalous arms research, production and export.

Technological development has reached a level where comprehensive surveillance is possible. Since the disclosure of the activities of the NSA and other secret services we know that these possibilities are in fact being used. We reject every kind of surveillance and demand the protection of privacy.

The universal respect of human rights leaves no room for their limitation or non-observance. Violations of human rights must be named, brought to court and prosecuted, no matter by whom and against whom they have been committed.

Obviously, it is of fundamental importance for the survival of humankind that we enable our children and grandchildren to unfold and use the capacities with which they were born: their basic trust, their inquisitiveness towards everything about them, their happiness and creativity. Change in the attitude towards life in our culture, which includes the education system, is being brought about as a consequence of encounters in mutual respect, by acknowledging the equal value of different opinions and by appreciating others in mutuality. This will open the space for children to comprehend diversity as

a chance and opportunity and will enable them to reach consensual solutions in sensitive, trustful and loving relationships among one another. Thus we express in a salutary way our comprehensive boundedness to one another.

Under these auspices, we have entered our ecumenical pilgrimage and ask for the support of all people of good will and of all groups in society working for the survival of humankind, and in turn offer them our support.

*What Can Each Individual Do?*

Every one of us personally has to answer the question: when and what is “enough”? Therefore, participants of the Ecumenical Assembly in Mainz/ Germany 2014 have formulated a concrete personal commitment:

Hereby, I, ..... (name), commit myself to a new departure. I will participate in the seven years’ ecumenical pilgrimage of Justice, Peace and Integrity of the Creation.

Therefore, I pledge:

- to live in such a way as to enable “Good Living Together” of all men
- to protect the human commons such as water, air and soil
- to acquire knowledge and share it with others in better understanding the structural conditions, like the gap between rich and poor and the unequal distribution and use of resources
- to work for an oikoumene of cooperation between all religions and worldviews against intolerance and discrimination towards peoples and social groups
- to a greater appreciation of all kinds of labour (work);
- to develop a culture of welcome for asylum-seekers and refugees
- to check my own consumer behavior and to share my financial resources
- to transmit these ethical values to my family and to those close to me

We cannot pursue this path alone. We need each other and we need God's support on our way of transformation.

We pray with the words of Dorothee Sölle (2001):

(Wir schlagen vor, dies in Deutsch zu übernehmen)

This Ecumenical Assembly needs a follow-up within 3 to 4 years to assess the commitments and projects that we have accepted here.

Mainz, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2014

## Appendix C

### Statement from the WCC Executive Committee on the Centenary of the Armenian Genocide

*During 2015 – the centenary year of the Armenian genocide by the Ottoman Empire – the executive committee of the WCC met in Armenia on 8-13 June 2015, hosted by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, to honour the martyrs and victims of the genocide. The executive committee agreed this statement:*

During the centenary year of the Armenian genocide by the Ottoman Empire, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) is meeting in this country on 8-13 June 2015, hosted by the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, to honour the martyrs and victims of the genocide. We visit the genocide memorial to remember them and to pray in the name of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. And we celebrate the life of the Armenian nation and the witness of the Armenian church.

The executive committee recalls the Minute on the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly in 2013 in Busan. This important action by the 10th Assembly followed many other occasions on which the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) had called for recognition of the Armenian genocide by the United Nations (UN) and by member states, dating back to the 1979 session of the UN Human Rights Commission. The WCC has played a key role over many years in accompanying the Armenian church in speaking out and working for recognition of the genocide, and for appropriate responses to the genocide's continuing impacts on the Armenian people.

A minute adopted at the 6th Assembly of the WCC held in 1983 in Vancouver acknowledged that "The silence of the world community and deliberate efforts to deny even historical facts have been consistent sources of anguish and growing despair to the Armenian people, the Armenian churches and many others." While some continue their efforts to deny or minimize these historical events, the executive committee is greatly encouraged by His Holiness Pope Francis' public recognition on 12 April 2015 of the mass killing of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians as genocide. We stress that there is a duty on the international community to remember the victims of

genocide, in order to heal these historical wounds and to guard against similar atrocities in the future.

The WCC, with its many member churches, has participated in several events marking the centenary, including the official commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and canonization of the martyrs in Yerevan, Armenia, on 21-25 April. The WCC and its member churches will continue to participate in the ongoing centennial commemorations this year by the Armenian diaspora, including with the Armenian Church Holy See of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon, on 18-19 July. The Executive Committee thanks the many member churches and ecumenical partners around the world that have observed or will observe this ongoing centenary in their own contexts, and that have spoken in recognition of the genocide and in commemoration of its victims. Through these commemorations, we acknowledge that these tragic events occurred, and that they must be named by their right name.

The Armenian genocide was accompanied in the same historical and political context by genocidal acts against other – mostly Christian – communities of Aramean, Chaldean, Syrian, Assyrian and Greek descent, which have blighted history at the beginning of the 20th century.

Denial, impunity and the failure to remember such events encourage their repetition. Those who deny or attack the life and dignity of a sister or brother undermine and destroy the humanity of both the victim and themselves. These centennial commemorations should mark the passing of the time when governments remain reluctant to name what occurred one hundred years ago as genocide. We urge all governments to abandon this reluctance.

In this centenary year, we call the international community, the WCC's member churches and all people of faith and good will to remembrance, and to re-commit to the prevention of genocide and all crimes against humanity.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12)

## Appendix D

### Solidarity Letter to Member Churches

A letter of solidarity following terrorist attacks  
in Paris in November 2015

Geneva, 14 November 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I write to express the deep sadness and shock of the fellowship of churches over the terrifying events that unfolded in Paris. Be assured of the prayers of us all for those who grieve, and for those seized by fear.

Your leadership as churches will be called upon in these coming days in a very urgent way as people seek comfort and meaning. Within congregations throughout the country, most particularly in Paris, there will be a need for the gathered faithful to be reminded of the hope present in God's love, that despite the feelings of terror and confusion, we are never abandoned. Scripture and faith and the strength of community must be our refuge in these coming days.

I commend to you the statement, accompanying this letter, issued by the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, currently meeting in Geneva. These words are offered as a voice of solidarity with you.

Again, allow me to offer the condolences of fellow Christians around the world, and our commitment to support you in prayer.

Yours in our Common Lord,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit  
WCC general secretary



## Appendix E

### WCC Delegation Visits Ireland\*

2 December 2015

*A WCC delegation visited Ireland from 28 November to 1 December to explore how the international ecumenical community may best support churches in the global fellowship and work together on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.*

A World Council of Churches (WCC) delegation visited Ireland from 28 November to 1 December 2015 to explore how the international ecumenical community may best support churches in the global fellowship and work together on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

The delegation included Dr Clare Amos, programme executive for interreligious dialogue and cooperation, WCC contact person for member church relations in UK and Ireland, Marianne Ejdersten, director of communication and member of the Staff Leadership Group, and the Rev. Garland Pierce, senior assistant to the general secretary of the World Council of Churches. The delegation was hosted by the Most Reverend Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough, the Anglican Primate of Ireland.

Part of the delegation went to the border barriers in Northern Ireland that separate Irish nationalist and unionist neighbourhoods.

“Northern Ireland is becoming a more diverse society as people from various countries and cultural backgrounds make their home here. This increasing diversity has the potential to enhance the cultural tapestry of Northern Irish society. However, the influx of people from diverse backgrounds can also cause intercultural tensions which can ultimately escalate into racist violence. The churches can play a significant role in peace building, building bridges between groups, and they have done that for many years instead of building walls,” said Bishop Alan Abernethy of Connor in his introduction to the Irish context.

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\* <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-delegation-visits-north-ireland-and-border-barriers>

“The wall, or in fact the Wall, is called peace lines or peace walls. They range in length from a few hundred yards to over three miles (5 km). They may be made of iron, brick, and/or steel and are up to 25 feet (7.6 m) high. Some have gates in them that allow passage during daylight but are closed at night,” said Bishop Alan Abernethy, and he added, “They have been built at urban interface areas in Belfast, Derry and elsewhere. The stated purpose of the wall is to minimize inter-communal violence between different groups.”

“The churches in Ireland are working together and connecting in Christ”, explained Mervyn McCullagh, executive officer at the Irish Council of Churches (ICC). He added, “The Irish Council of Churches was founded already in 1923 in the aftermath of the civil war and is the formal national body through which our member churches engage in dialogue and act on a wide variety of issues. We are established by our member churches and funded by them.” McCullagh underlined the need “to continue the work on reconciliation, healing and peace building.”

The programme of the delegation visit in Belfast included meetings and discussions with the leadership of the Irish Council of Churches, with McCullagh and the Rev Dr Donald Watts, president of the ICC; discussions with the Church of Ireland featuring Bishop Abernethy, Bishop John McDowell of Clogher; the Methodist Church, with the Rev Dr Brian Anderson, president of that church, Rev Dr John Stephens and Kenneth Twyble; and the Roman Catholic Church was represented by the Very Reverend Eugene O’Hagan.

Dr Clare Amos was the guest preacher in St Anne’s Cathedral in Belfast on Advent Sunday morning. In her sermon, Amos reflected on her experiences of living in Beirut where her husband Alan was the chaplain to the Anglican community in both Lebanon and Syria during the Lebanese civil war. Rev. Garland Pierce preached at the Queens University Chapel in Belfast.

The delegation also took part in the ecumenical service of prayer for climate justice and the climate rally at St Anne’s Cathedral. Rev. Michael Parker, the canon of St Anne’s, said people have a “moral obligation to care for the world and its entire people.” “Climate change threatens all that we hold dear, and the message from today’s service and rally is that we must join together as churches, workers, activists and leaders to respond now,” he concluded.

The rally was organized by groups working on climate change, including Christian Aid, Friends of the Earth, Oxfam Ireland, Queen’s University Students’ Union and Trócaire.

The delegation was hosted in Belfast by Bishop Abernethy of Connor, a member of the WCC Central Committee. The programme in Belfast included a meeting and guided tour of St Anne's Cathedral with Rev. Campbell Dixon, cathedral guide Vernon Clegg and meetings with Rev. John Brackenbridge, convenor of the church relations committee of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and Rev. Cheryl Meban, representative of the executive committee of World Communion of Reformed Churches, and Rev. Canon Ian Ellis, editor of the Church of Ireland Gazette, press officer Dr Paul Harron and Karen Bushby, diocesan communications officer of Connor.



## Appendix F

### Christians Are Called to Be Peacemakers and to Build Just Peace\*

2 December 2014

*Pilgrimage towards peace and justice formed the theme of remarks opening the 5-day Ecumenical Peace Consultation in Sigtuna, Sweden. The WCC general secretary invited 80 participants from all over the world to join in a common journey of hope.*

Pilgrimage towards peace and justice formed the theme of remarks opening the 5-day Ecumenical Peace Consultation in Sigtuna, Sweden. Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) invited 80 participants from all over the world to join in a common journey of hope.

“We are on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. We are in the one ecumenical movement together,” said Tveit. We are seeking the visible expression of our unity.” In our time, he added, we too “are particularly called to find new expressions of our unity in Christian solidarity. This solidarity is a way to just peace,” a way to “solidarity with all, regardless of faith.”

Tveit added: “This consultation is one of the means by which we are seeking to give further form and content to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, and to determine how we might practically travel together on this journey.”

Tveit concluded, “Just peace in a comprehensive sense requires that just peace be established as an end of armed conflicts. Christians are called to be peacemakers and to build just peace. That means that we need to be peace builders, building the Shalom/Salaam in the wider and deeper sense.”

Rev. Dr Anders Wejryd, Archbishop emeritus and Europe president of the World Council of Churches, underlined the message: “Religion is dangerous – and wonderful. Religion can let lose the best and the worst in humankind. Maybe it is not so much because of religion per se as it is because of humankind.”

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\* <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/christians-are-called-to-be-peacemakers-and-to-build-just-peace>.

In a video message to the Peace Consultation, Dr Agnes Abuom, moderator of the World Council of Churches, said: “It is only through peace we can bring development and prosperity.”

Abuom added in her message to the consultation: “Reconciliation will cost. It requires sacrifice on all sides of any conflict.”

Leonardo Emberti Gialloreti from the Sant’Egidio community said in his presentation: “Peace has to be a passion, not a profession! Blessed are the peacemakers!”

The WCC consultation and workshop on Peace building and Advocacy for Just Peace, 1-5 December 2014, is hosted by the Church of Sweden, Uniting Church in Sweden, and Christian Council of Sweden. It brings together more than 80 ecumenical advocacy experts, church leaders, as well as civil society and United Nations partners.

## Appendix G

### Statement on Ukraine

25 January 2022

The World Council of Churches, with its member churches throughout the world, urgently appeals for peace for the people of Ukraine. As we follow the news of the mad progression towards war, we plead for a different logic than one based on geopolitical competition – a logic that considers the death and suffering that any armed conflict would inevitably visit on the children, women and men of Ukraine. We pray for a change of hearts and minds, for de-escalation, and for dialogue instead of threats. God’s people – and members of the ecumenical fellowship – find themselves on both sides of the current confrontation. But our God is a God of peace, not of war and bloodshed. Though the things that make for peace may be hidden from the eyes of those driving the march to war, we pray that they may yet be opened, and that peace may yet prevail.

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca

Acting General Secretary

World Council of Churches



## Appendix H

### WCC Statement on Ukraine

22 February 2022

*On 22 February 2022, World Council of Churches acting general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca expressed grave concern for the people of Ukraine amid the latest developments and escalating tensions threatening peace and security.*

The World Council of Churches is gravely concerned about the latest developments and escalating tensions threatening the peace and security of the people of Ukraine. We appeal urgently for an end to the dangerous geopolitical competition that has precipitated this crisis, for de-escalation and reduction of tensions, and for respect for international law and established national borders. We call for a return to dialogue and to the principles of the Minsk Agreements as a pathway to a peaceful resolution of the longstanding tensions and divisions in the region, within the framework of international law and commitments. We plead again for consideration of the death and suffering that any armed conflict would inevitably visit on the children, women and men of Ukraine. And once again we pray that eyes of those driving the march to war may yet be opened, and that peace may yet prevail.

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca

Acting General Secretary

World Council of Churches



## Appendix I

### WCC Calls for an Immediate End to the Current Armed Hostilities

24 February 2022

The World Council of Churches denounces any and every use of deadly armed force to resolve disputes that could be resolved by dialogue. We firmly believe that dialogue - based on the principles of international law and respect for established national borders - was and is the proper path for the resolution of tensions surrounding Ukraine. We call for an immediate end to the current armed hostilities, and for the protection of all human lives and communities threatened by this violence. We urge all member churches and all people of good will around the world to join us in prayer for peace for the people of Ukraine and the region.

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca  
Acting General Secretary

World Council of Churches



## Appendix J

### In Ukraine, “Such a War has No Excuse, Neither from God, nor from People”

25 February 2022

*In an “Address to the Faithful and Citizens of Ukraine” on 24 February, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry of Kyiv and All Ukraine (Moscow Patriarchate) candidly addressed the current situation: “Trouble has happened,” he said. “Most regrettably, Russia has started military actions against Ukraine, and at this fateful time, I urge you not to panic, be courageous and show love for your homeland and for one another.”*

The Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, and primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, further urged people to pray for Ukraine, for the army and the people, to forget mutual quarrels and misunderstandings and to unite in love for God and the homeland.

“In this tragic time, we express special love and support for our soldiers who stand guard and protect and defend our land and our people,” he stated. “May God bless and guard them!”

Metropolitan Onuphry appealed directly to the president of Russia to ask for an immediate end to the “fratricidal war”. “The war between these peoples is a repetition of the sin of Cain, who killed his own brother out of envy,” he stated. “Such a war has no excuse, neither from God, nor from people.”

He concluded: “I appeal to all for common sense, which teaches us to solve our earthly problems in mutual dialogue and mutual understanding, and sincerely hope that God will forgive us our sins and the peace of God will prevail in our land and in the world!”



## Appendix K

### WCC Urges to Stop This War, and to Restore Peace To the People and Nation of Ukraine

25 February 2022

The World Council of Churches affirms and supports the appeal issued on 24 February 2022 by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry of Kyiv and All Ukraine (Moscow Patriarchate).

The World Council of Churches affirms and supports the appeal issued on 24 February 2022 by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry of Kyiv and All Ukraine (Moscow Patriarchate). Recalling the ties of history and affinity between the Ukrainian people and the Russian people, His Beatitude called directly on President Putin to stop the war, which he likened to Cain's murder of Abel.

This call must be heard. WCC makes the same appeal to President Putin, to stop this fratricidal war, and to restore peace to the people and nation of Ukraine.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”  
Matthew 5: 9

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca  
Acting General Secretary  
World Council of Churches



## Appendix L

### Extract from the opening address given by the Rev Christian Krieger, President of the Conference of European Churches, to the European regional pre-assembly for the 11th Assembly of the WCC, held online on 25-26 February 2022

Our meeting has been organised with the aim of offering a space for reflection, sharing and exchange between the European delegates who will participate at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches, scheduled to take place in Karlsruhe from 31 August – 8 September 2022. The goal is:

- to prepare Assembly participants to engage in the life and processes of the Assembly
- to offer European reflections on questions of church and state and church and secularity
- to contribute new insights to the programmatic work of WCC in these areas.

Everything has been prepared to examine the theme “Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity”, to exchange on the realities of our churches, their spirit of Unity, their place in plural and secularised societies, their contribution to the social and political debate, the challenge of witnessing to the Gospel in an environment at times in the grip of strong social, cultural and religious tensions.

Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity! A theme that draws on the very heart of the gospel which offers to the world the depths and wonder of the love of God. A Christological theme that focuses on the world and recalls God's design of reconciliation and unity. A theme that opens an effective way for the churches to rethink their common call to seek the communion (*koinonia*) that is God's gift and promise, to shape their service (*diakonia*) to the people of the world and to creation. We were prepared to reflect that theme but then, yesterday morning, the news of the Russian army's entry into Ukraine, to lead the offensive on Kiev, overwhelmed us,

appalled us, and disheartened us. We had to recognise that what is stirring the world today, what is setting the political leaders, the actors of civil society, in motion, is not the love of Christ, but the terrifying thunder of weapons on European soil, a war and the toll of bloodshed, and this all on the borders of the European Union. I would like to stress here, in these opening remarks, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ carries a message of peace for all humankind, one that calls for a deep respect of the dignity of every human being. This message is rooted in God's mercy, the forgiveness He offers by the gift of Himself to anyone who comes to Him. This message calls Christians and churches to be artisans of peace and reconciliation.

Driven by this call, the Conference of European Churches strongly condemns the act of war that the Russian armed forces have committed in Ukraine. This act is a denial of borders, of the principle of the free determination of peoples, and an affront to the international order. CEC calls on all those who have the capacity to contribute to the immediate end of this aggression. On the level of the European Union, political leaders and the international community, no effort should be spared to limit the shedding of innocent blood and to return to the path of diplomatic dialogue and international order.

The Conference of European Churches calls on Christians to join together in prayer for peace for the outcome of this war, for its victims, for those who are working for a peaceful outcome, and for all those who have been and will continue to be affected by it.

## Appendix M

### Letter from the Acting General Secretary of the World Council of Churches to His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Russian Orthodox Church

Geneva, 2 March 2022

Your Holiness,

It is with great pain and with a breaking heart that I am writing to Your Holiness. The tragic situation of the war in Ukraine has brought tremendous suffering and loss of lives. Many of our brothers and sisters had to leave their homes—including the elderly, women, and children—to save their lives. The whole world is looking with concern and expects to see a sign of hope for a peaceful solution. I receive letters every day from different parts of the world, from church leaders and the faithful of our WCC constituency asking to approach Your Holiness to mediate so that the war can be stopped and the great suffering ended. In these times of hopelessness, many look at you as the one who could bring a sign of hope for a peaceful solution.

I write to Your Holiness as acting general secretary of the WCC but also as an Orthodox priest. Please, raise up your voice and speak on behalf of the suffering brothers and sisters, most of whom are also faithful members of our Orthodox Church.

Western Christians celebrate today Ash Wednesday, the day of repentance as the beginning of Lent; likewise, we, as Orthodox, will celebrate this coming Sunday the “Sunday of Forgiveness” to mark our beginning of Lent next Monday. These powerful moments in our liturgical calendars call us to repentance, peace and reconciliation.

While celebrating these spiritual moments, with filial respect and consideration, I write to Your Holiness to intervene and mediate with the authorities to stop this war, the bloodshed and the suffering, and to make efforts to bring peace through dialogue and negotiations.

Respectfully Yours in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Saucă  
Acting General Secretary  
World Council of Churches

## Appendix N

Reply from His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow  
and all Russia, Russian Orthodox Church,  
to the Very Reverend Archpriest Ioan Sauca,  
Acting General Secretary, World Council of Churches

Moscow, 10 March 2022

Dear Father Ioan,

I thank you for your letter of March 2, 2022. Having known you for many years as a faithful steward of the Church of Christ and tireless worker in the field of education and formation of younger generations, I deeply appreciate your work as Acting General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, which is aimed at promoting accord and mutual respect between representatives of different Christian confessions.

Our Church joined the WCC in 1961, having accepted its renewed basis as “fellowship of Churches” and the Toronto Statement that read, in particular, “The Council as such cannot possibly become the instrument of one confession or school <...> the member churches should recognize their solidarity with each other, render assistance to each other in case of need, and refrain from such actions as are incompatible with brotherly relationship.”

Since 1983, it has been one of the WCC’s priorities to engage its member churches in the process of acknowledging their shared responsibility for justice, peace and the integrity of creation within the world community. That is to say, our WCC membership, dialogues, discussions based on the principle of equality, and cooperation with the entire Christendom were not only an expression of our commitment to the cause of reconciliation between people, but also gave us confidence in the solidarity and support of the world Christian fellowship.

These days, millions of Christians all over the world in their prayers and thoughts turn to the dramatic developments in Ukraine.

As you know, this conflict did not start today. It is my firm belief that its initiators are not the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, who came from one

Kievan baptismal font, are united by common faith, common saints and prayers, and share common historical fate.

The origins of the confrontation lie in the relationships between the West and Russia. By the 1990s Russia had been promised that its security and dignity would be respected. However, as time went by, the forces overtly considering Russia to be their enemy came close to its borders. Year after year, month after month, the NATO member states have been building up their military presence, disregarding Russia's concerns that these weapons may one day be used against it.

Moreover, the political forces which make it their aim to contain Russia were not going to fight against it themselves. They were planning to use other means, having tried to make the brotherly peoples – Russians and Ukrainians – enemies. They spared no effort, no funds to flood Ukraine with weapons and warfare instructors. Yet, the most terrible thing is not the weapons, but the attempt to “re-educate,” to mentally remake Ukrainians and Russians living in Ukraine into enemies of Russia.

Pursuing the same end was the church schism created by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in 2018. It has taken its toll on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

As far back as 2014, when blood was being shed in Kiev's Maidan and there were first victims, the WCC expressed its concern. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the WCC General Secretary at the time, said on March 3, 2014, “The World Council of Churches is deeply concerned by the current dangerous developments in Ukraine. The situation puts many innocent lives in grave jeopardy. And like a bitter wind from the Cold War, it risks further undermining the international community's capacity to act now or in the future on the many urgent issues that will require a collective and principled response.”

That was also when an armed conflict broke out in the Donbas region, whose population was defending their right to speak the Russian language, demanding respect for their historical and cultural tradition. However, their voices went unheard, just as thousands of victims among the Donbas population went unnoticed in the Western world.

This tragic conflict has become a part of the large-scale geopolitical strategy aimed, first and foremost, at weakening Russia.

And now the Western leaders are imposing such economic sanctions on Russia that will be harmful to everyone. They make their intentions blatantly obvious – to bring sufferings not only to the Russian political or military leaders, but specifically to the Russian people. Russophobia is spreading across the Western world at an unprecedented pace.

I pray unceasingly that by His power the Lord help establish the lasting and justice-based peace as soon as possible. I ask you and our brothers in Christ, united in the Council, to share this prayer with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Dear Father Ioan, I express my hope that even in these trying times, as has been the case throughout its history, the World Council of Churches will be able to remain a platform for unbiased dialogue, free from political preferences and one-sided approach.

May the Lord preserve and save the peoples of Russia and Ukraine!

With paternal love,

+KIRILL

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA



## Appendix O

### Statement of Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca, WCC acting general secretary on Ukraine

11 March 2022

*The World Council of Churches is appalled by the escalating impact of the conflict in Ukraine on civilians – the women, men and children of Ukraine – and by what appears to be increasingly indiscriminate attacks.*

The airstrike on the Mariupol Hospital No.3 on 9 March, attacks affecting other hospitals, schools, kindergartens and residential areas, and the rising toll of civilian deaths and injuries all indicate that international humanitarian law is being disregarded. Reports of the use of cluster munitions, including in populated areas, and of area bombardment of towns and villages, are deeply disturbing. The WCC denounces all such violations of international humanitarian law, particularly concerning the protection of civilians, which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Both as a matter of international law and of fundamental moral principles, we appeal for an immediate end to such indiscriminate attacks, for respect for international humanitarian principles and the God-given human dignity and rights of every human being, and for a ceasefire and negotiations to end this tragic conflict.

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca  
Acting General Secretary  
World Council of Churches



## Appendix P

### Churches Respond to Growing Humanitarian Needs in Ukraine and Bordering Countries

11 March 2022

*Hosting refugees, providing food, helping in hospitals, and ringing church bells as a warning when shelling starts—these are some of the many ways churches are responding in Ukraine and bordering countries as the war continues. More than two million people have poured out of Ukraine, and estimates from relief groups show that 18 million people—a third of the country’s population—will need humanitarian assistance.*

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate reports that it is helping all those in need—the military, hospitals, and refugees all over Ukraine.

Monasteries are providing all possible humanitarian aid to refugees, internally displaced persons and all those affected by the war. Refugee reception points have also been organized at churches through joint efforts of the clergy and volunteers. Some provide 24-hour aid, giving out warm clothes, mats, sleeping bags, water and medicines.

Queues and checkpoints at the borders of Ukraine are overflowing with refugees, with 10-kilometer lines formed at some points.

“We are trying to help everyone,” reported one parish in Lviv, as packages of food were taken to a centre for refugees, which was operating at the Arena Lviv stadium. There, churches are working with the Department of Social Protection of the Lviv City Council.

“The clergy and all the employees of our churches are making every effort to help all those who need it,” the Volodymyr-Volyn Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate reported.

Many retired doctors among parishioners also are pitching in to help.

Ukrainian Orthodox Churches are also providing basements for the possibility of shelter from shelling and bombing, with churches helping to sound the alarm of impending attacks by ringing the church bells.

Fr Mykolay Danylevych, deputy chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, has reported that priests are also accompanying many with prayer. ““Priests pray, comfort and reassure people, and provide spiritual and even psychological help,” he said.

## **Needs are Growing**

There is an urgent need for humanitarian support in Ukraine and in the countries to which many refugees are fleeing — Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, as well as Belarus and Russia.

ACT Alliance members are responding to these needs for humanitarian support. Churches are organizing fundraising; collecting clothes, food and hygiene items; and organizing accommodation for refugees.

ACT has issued an alert and is supporting national members through its Rapid Response Fund, while an appeal for multi-country support will assist in scaling up the response in Ukraine and neighboring countries.

Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and Caritas partners are providing immediate support to meet ongoing needs as the situation intensifies.

“CRS and partners on the ground are preparing across Ukraine and in bordering countries, ready to provide safe shelter, hot meals, hygiene supplies, transport to safe areas, counseling support and more,” reported CRS.

The Red Cross is providing lifesaving aid to those in need—both in Ukraine and in neighboring areas.

“Many of the people affected were already vulnerable before the conflict and now face an even harsher situation as they are losing their homes and their livelihoods, being forced to seek shelter wherever they can or fleeing their country in search of safety. They urgently need food, water and shelter, but also emergency medical care, protective measures and psychosocial support to avert an even greater humanitarian catastrophe,” said Birgitte Bischoff Ebbesen, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies regional director for Europe.

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, announced a major fundraising effort that will help those most affected.

Archbishop Elpidophoros also announced the creation of the Ukrainian Relief Effort, which was established in collaboration with International Orthodox Christian Charities. “We join our spirit to the spirit of His All-Holiness and exhort all our Faithful: offer prayers and tangible support for all the Ukrainian People, those of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and those of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate, those of the Ukrainian Catholic and Jewish communities, and all who find themselves in the dire circumstances of war,” stated Archbishop Elpidophoros.

Hungarian Interchurch Aid set up a 24-hour refugee support point on the Ukrainian side of the border at Beregsurány.

The line of refugees trying to cross into Hungary at this crossing is kilometres long, according to reports.

The support point was set up at Asztély, near the border crossing, in a heated pavilion, which will be supplemented with additional tents and mobile toilets in the coming days.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) launched a call for donations to support the churches and people of Ukraine, who are fleeing their homes and seeking shelter, basic necessities such as food and water.

LWF general secretary Rev. Anne Burghardt said this “support is vital for people desperately seeking shelter from the gunfire and bombing. Every donation counts.”

Bishop Christian Alsted, who serves in the United Methodist Central Conference that consists of Nordic, Baltic and Eurasian countries, including Russia and Ukraine, offered a pastoral word on the crisis, and urged prayer as a form of response as well.

“We pray for a change of hearts and minds of leaders, we pray for de-escalation and dialogue instead of violence and war,” stated Bishop Alsted. “I call on all our congregations to intercede for the people of Ukraine, and for the leaders in the world, who have the power to bring an end to war.”



## Appendix Q

### ACT Alliance, WCC Delegation Visits Hungary, Ukraine and Romania with a Focus on Humanitarian Needs, Church Response

18 March 2022

A delegation from ACT Alliance and the World Council of Churches (WCC) visited Hungary, Ukraine and Romania on 14-18 March, focusing on humanitarian needs and church response.

A delegation from the ACT Alliance and the World Council of Churches visit the Vama Siret border crossing, Romania. The Vama Siret border crossing connects northeast Romania with Ukraine. Located north of Siret and further in the south the city of Suceava, the crossing connects Romania with the Ukrainian village of Terebleche and further north the city of Chernivtsi.

#### **Diakonia and Ecumenical Solidarity**

Meeting with Hungarian Inter-Church Aid, the delegation visited refugee centers in Budapest, then held a roundtable with ecumenical partners in Hungary.

The group also visited the Ukraine and Romanian border to see the work done by Hungarian Inter-Church Aid in support of refugees.

The delegation also connected with Aidrom, making border visits and learning about the rapidly-changing needs of refugees.

The delegation was also received by His Eminence Father Iustin, bishop of Maramuresh and Satmar of the Romanian Orthodox Church, learning about the situation at two crossing points for Ukrainian refugees.

His Eminence Iustin explained to them that the Romanian Orthodox Church is very dynamically and actively involved in the reception and in taking Christian care of all those crossing the border into Romania, whether they stay or transition freely on the way to western countries. The Ukrainian refugees are provided with medicines, food, clothes, accommodation or guidance to destinations.

An important facet of care at these crossing points comes from priests and volunteers who show love, warmth and generosity.

The Petrova Monastery is hosting more than 50 mothers with children for an indefinite period, providing accommodation, meals and other care. Through collaboration with the educational authorities and institutions, children are also given the opportunity to attend school and learn in their native language within the Ukrainian communities in the area.

The Romanian Orthodox Church is also joining many other Christians across the world in praying for peace.

WCC deputy general secretary Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri said that meeting with refugees and those helping them was a sharp reminder of the appalling and escalating impact of the conflict in Ukraine on civilians. “The women, men and children of Ukraine are suffering from what appears to be ongoing indiscriminate attacks,” she said. “Hospitals, schools, kindergartens and residential areas—refugees are pouring forth from these spaces with firsthand stories of deep trauma.”

Peter Prove, director of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, said that, as international humanitarian law continues to be disregarded, civilians are bearing the brunt of the conflict. “It is deeply disturbing to witness the effects of what may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity,” said Prove. “Humanitarian aid groups and churches are unified in calling for a ceasefire and negotiations to end this tragic conflict.”

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, general secretary of ACT Alliance, spoke on the second day of the visit, as the delegation met with Hungarian Inter-Church Aid. “At the airport, they have a welcome centre and also, around Budapest, different places where they are providing all kinds of support for Ukrainian refugees,” said de Faria. “By today, you have more than 3 million refugees in neighbouring countries, and we will be visiting and talking and checking how is the situation of them and the challenges they face in this war.”

## Appendix R

### Local Churches Are Frontline Response for 10 Million Displaced Ukrainians, Shares WCC and ACT Alliance

23 March 2022

*During a 22 March press briefing, a delegation from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and ACT Alliance shared their observations from a recent trip to Hungary, Romania and Ukraine, where they witnessed firsthand both urgent humanitarian needs and a robust church response.*

“You see the consequences of war which is forcing millions of people to leave their land,” said Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, ACT Alliance general secretary, noting the heightened risk for human trafficking and forced labour.

“We heard from ACT members and from church workers that the first wave of refugees were mainly people with healthy financial situations and good connections in Europe,” he said, while a second wave comprised people with fewer resources.

“The third wave we are facing now is of people without any resources,” he said. “During the visit we could see the distinctive role that church and faith-based organizations played in the emergency response so far.”

Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri, WCC deputy general secretary, said that the reason church response is able to happen is because many churches are well-equipped structurally to quickly turn compassion into actions that address human need, wherever it occurs.

“When in Hungary and in Romania, we heard the churches telling us that they were among the first ones to respond to the crisis at the borders,” she said. “For me, it’s not so much the churches responding to this particular issue—it’s because they already have structures in the churches to respond to any humanitarian need.”

Those structures have been used with a sense of caring and mission by churches that have responded, for example, to COVID-19 and other disasters, she added. “They are using the same structures to respond now to the humanitarian needs of the refugees coming out of Ukraine.”

Peter Prove, WCC director of international affairs, commented on the large dimension of this humanitarian catastrophe. “I think the latest figures we have heard from UN sources are something approaching 10 million people are displaced as a result of this conflict, both refugees crossing the borders into other countries, and internally displaced within Ukraine.”

That amounts to one quarter of the population of Ukraine, he said. “That really sets the dimensions of this crisis in perspective,” he said.

Prove took a moment to celebrate the response of local churches. “This welcome, organized at the local level by local communities and local churches, is incredibly warm and incredibly hospitable, and that is very much to be celebrated,” he said.

All three speakers emphasized the need for the same level of hospitality and care for people of colour and others who are not receiving equal consideration as they, too, flee Ukraine.

The press briefing was moderated by Simon Chambers, director of communication ACT Alliance and Marianne Ejdersten, WCC director of communication.

## Appendix S

### CEC-CCEE Joint Declaration on the War in Ukraine

We, the members of the Joint Committee of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences and the Conference of European Churches, gathered in Bratislava for our annual meeting, call on the leaders of nations and the international community to do everything in their power to end the current war that is destroying lives and causing untold suffering.

The heart of the Christian faith is peace and reconciliation, exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ: "Jesus never promoted violence or intolerance. He openly condemned the use of force to gain power over others" (Fratelli Tutti 238). His humility and His compassion for those who suffer were at the centre of His ministry: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless" (Matthew 9:36).

Religion cannot be used as a means to justify this war. All religions, and we as Christians, are united in condemning the Russian aggression, the crimes that are being committed against the people of Ukraine and the blasphemy that is the misuse of religion in this context.

Witnessing the great suffering of those living in, and fleeing from, Ukraine, we urge religious and political authorities to engage in true dialogue and promote a lasting peace.

We give thanks for the tremendous work carried out by the churches and NGOs, as well as local and state authorities in the neighbouring countries of Ukraine and beyond, in welcoming those leaving their homes and escaping the war.

We also acknowledge the voices of the Russian people who are courageously protesting against the invasion, and we stand in solidarity with them in their struggle.

We exhort the continuation of all life-affirming endeavours that give witness to the Love of Christ for our neighbours.

We continue to pray for the gift of peace and call on all Christians to join us in this prayer while strengthening their efforts in affirming the value of life and in actively promoting reconciliation.

*21 March 2022, Bratislava*

## Appendix T

### Response to Letter from the First Lady of Ukraine

*In a response to a letter from First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska, World Council of Churches (WCC) acting general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca expressed both his appreciation for her candid reflections as well as his own pain at the ongoing and increasingly grave humanitarian consequences of the conflict.*

Geneva, 23 March 2022

Your Excellency, Dear Mme Olena Zelenska,

Thank you for your warm and moving letter addressing me as “Father Ioan” as well as in my capacity as the acting general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and writing not as the wife of the President of Ukraine but “as a Ukrainian woman, a mother, and a wife. This is not even a letter - but the voice of my pain accumulated during these days of the war”.

Reading your letter I heard the cries and the weeping of the Ukrainian mothers who lost their children, of the families who lost their dear ones, the despair of those under the ruins of bombed houses, of those dehydrated and starving without hope of escape since the ravages of war do not allow for secure humanitarian corridors.

But I also hear the pain and suffering of Russian mothers, wives, children and parents who receive their dear ones in a coffin, from this illogical fratricide war. On both sides there is suffering and despair and all are waiting for an end of the conflict.

For me personally, myself an Orthodox priest, the pain and puzzlement is even greater: why do we have this destructive and fratricidal war between two sister nations and how is it possible for two peoples who are in their great majority fellow Orthodox believers to experience such atrocities when our Orthodox theology and the lives of our saints gave us such powerful examples of love, humility, respect, harmony and service to all the needy and suffering.

During the period of mounting tensions over Ukraine and following the outbreak of conflict on 24 February, WCC leadership and I have been intensively engaged in seeking ways to address the situation. On that very day

of 24 February when the war started, I made a strong statement supporting the statement of Metropolitan Onufriy and called on President Putin to “stop this fratricidal war, and to restore peace to the people and nation of Ukraine”.

Most of those efforts have not been possible to share in any public or semi-public domain in real-time. But I want to share with you this update on our initiatives thus far and what are currently envisaged as next steps.

WCC is in close contact with ACT Alliance regarding church-based humanitarian responses to the situation in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries due to the conflict. Most recently, a joint delegation visit took place in the region 14-18 March, to Hungary and Romania and border regions of Ukraine.

Having seen the impact of the conflict in the faces of refugees arriving in these neighbouring countries, and being aware of the plight and peril of all those civilians still trapped and unable to flee, we strongly underscore the urgent necessity of effective and secure humanitarian corridors to enable civilians to escape the fighting. I urge the Russian and Ukrainian forces, and the political leadership of both countries, to coordinate to ensure that such corridors are established and maintained until all those that wish to leave have done so. Moreover, I appeal to all those mounting the attacks that threaten civilians to remember their moral and legal responsibility to protect civilians, and their accountability before God for all innocent lives lost.

Already on 25 January 2022 WCC issued an urgent appeal for peace for the people of Ukraine, urging consideration of “the death and suffering that any armed conflict would inevitably visit on the children, women and men of Ukraine.” The statement noted that “God’s people – and members of the ecumenical fellowship – find themselves on both sides of the current confrontation”, but declared that “our God is a God of peace, not of war and bloodshed. Though the things that make for peace may be hidden from the eyes of those driving the march to war, we pray that they may yet be opened, and that peace may yet prevail.”

On 22 February 2022 WCC issued a further statement appealing for “de-escalation and reduction of tensions, and for respect for international law and established national borders.” The statement called for “a return to dialogue and to the principles of the Minsk Agreements as a pathway to a peaceful resolution of the longstanding tensions and divisions in the region, within the framework of international law and commitments.”

On 24 February 2022, as news of the invasion and armed conflict was breaking, the WCC issued a further statement: “The World Council of Churches denounces any and every use of deadly armed force to resolve disputes that could be resolved by dialogue. We firmly believe that dialogue - based on the principles of international law and respect for established national borders - was and is the proper path for the resolution of tensions surrounding Ukraine. We call for an immediate end to the current armed hostilities, and for the protection of all human lives and communities threatened by this violence. We urge all member churches and all people of good will around the world to join us in prayer for peace for the people of Ukraine and the region.”

Also during the morning of 24 February 2022, I undertook urgent consultations with representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church to compare understandings of what was occurring and its causes.

On 2 March 2022, as prayers for peace in Ukraine were taking place in churches around the world, I issued an appeal to H.H. Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church/Moscow Patriarchate “to intervene and mediate with the authorities to stop this war, the bloodshed and the suffering, and to make efforts to bring peace through dialogue and negotiations.”

As World Council of Churches, we have already made many statements condemning the war, calling for respect for international humanitarian law and for solving the conflict through dialogue. Our member Churches have also made many strong and bold statements of their own. We could make yet another statement, but I did not feel that it could really help. I have decided after reading your letter to contact the two Presidents, their Excellencies President Putin of the Russian Federation and President Zelensky of Ukraine, asking them to make an effort to come to the table of dialogue and to stop the bloodshed and destruction of Ukraine.

I attach the letter sent to the two presidents.

Your Excellency, esteemed Mme Olena Zelenska, I would like to close my letter by expressing my deep admiration for your hard work in the service of your country, for your care for the suffering, needy and refugees, for your efforts to speak out to the world about the tragic reality your people are currently enduring. May God give you strength and may He always accompany you in your work.

Many thanks for your invitation to come to Kyiv, together with other religious leaders. I pray God that before the great feast of Easter peace may prevail and the war will stop and I will be able to come to Kyiv and celebrate together the joyful feast of Easter and proclaim together with Christ's Resurrection a free, renewed and resurrected Ukraine.

With all my respect and love,

Father Ioan Sauca

Acting General Secretary

World Council of Churches

## Appendix U

### Letter from the WCC acting General Secretary to the Presidents of Russia and Ukraine

*In a letter to Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, president of the Russian Federation, and Volodymyr Oleksandrovytch Zelensky, president of Ukraine, World Council of Churches (WCC) acting general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca urged the leaders to listen to the cries of their own faithful people.*

H.E. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin

President of the Russian Federation

H.E. Volodymyr Oleksandrovytch Zelensky

President of Ukraine

Geneva, March 23, 2022

Your Excellencies,

It is with pain of heart and after long reflection and prayer that I write to you this letter. A few days ago I received a letter from the First Lady of Ukraine, Her Excellency Olena Volodymyrivna Zelenska, pleading that the World Council of Churches become “voice of those who suffer from war today” and “mediators in the real humanitarian corridors”.

She wrote to me as the leader of WCC, this worldwide Christian Ecumenical organisation with its 352 member Churches from all over the world and more than 580 million people. But what really broke my heart and made me write to you this letter is the way she addressed me as “dear Father Ioan”, saying that she did not write to me as the First Lady of Ukraine but “as a Ukrainian woman, a mother, and a wife. This is not even a letter - but the voice of my pain accumulated during these days of the war”.

I am not a politician nor a diplomat either. Therefore, I write to you this pastoral letter as a priest and spiritual leader, listening to the cries of your own faithful peoples, voicing their despair and suffering.

I hear in the words of the First Lady of Ukraine the weeping of the Ukrainian mothers who lost their children, of the families who lost their dear ones, the despair of those under the ruins of bombed houses, of those dehydrated and starving without hope of escape in the absence of secure humanitarian corridors.

But I also hear the pain and suffering of Russian mothers, wives, children and parents who receive their dear ones in a coffin, from this illogical fratricidal war. On both sides there is suffering and despair and all are waiting for an end of the conflict. And while the war rages, I am especially troubled by the disregard for the most fundamental moral and legal principles demanding protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. I appeal as earnestly as I can for civilians to be spared from further attacks, and that humanitarian corridors to enable them to escape from peril be established, maintained and secured.

As World Council of Churches, we have already made statements condemning the war, calling for respect for international humanitarian law and for solving the conflict through dialogue. Our member Churches have also made many strong and bold statements of their own. We can make yet another statement, but I did not feel that it could really help.

Excellencies, the end of conflict and the agreement on a peaceful solution is in your hands alone. Before your people and history, you will be the only ones responsible for it. No one from outside can solve or seek to impose any solution to this fraternal conflict.

We see now clear moves towards a new division in the world, a new alignment. We hear about a project for a new world order, a critical escalation of political and military tensions between east and west, raising again the spectre of nuclear conflagration, and portending at least another longstanding division of the continent of Europe. In the midst of a crisis of these dimensions, the whole world is searching for signs of hope for a peaceful solution. Please, do not let yourself be the instruments of such a new division and do not internationalize your family conflict.

You are two nations with two internationally recognised independent lands. Yet, you are and will always be sister nations. No one can deny or destroy that reality. You have Russian speaking Ukrainians and Ukrainian speaking Russians. They live together, many in mixed families. I have had Ukrainian and Russian students for 20 years during my carrier as Professor at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland. They would proudly expose

their distinct identity as nations and would be proud of the flag of their countries; otherwise they were always together. On Sundays, both Russians and Ukrainians would join the same Orthodox Church in the Geneva Old Town and would pray together. They would proudly identify one another as Russians and Ukrainians but with a spiritual bond no one could destroy. In the light of the above, for those of us who know your peoples, it is very painful to hear these days' hard words demonizing one another, full of hatred, and the rest of the world taking sides.

The World Council of Churches also needs both peoples. It continues to be an open and safe platform where people meet, share information, listen to one another even if they disagree. We do our best to be the mediator that brings about peace, unity and reconciliation. Please, help us achieve that.

In conclusion, voicing the plea of your own people and of our member Churches from all over the world I implore you: please, stop the war immediately, ask your soldiers to return to their families and put an end to all hostilities; give a chance to your own people to mourn and bury their dead according to their faith traditions; return to the table of dialogue and solve your own issues through brotherly discussions. I am aware that things are not easy since on each side there are hardliners who want either everything or nothing. Yet, without understanding and compromise which brotherly love brings about, lasting peace cannot be achieved. You can find enough support from the spiritual potential of your faithful people who came to be known and appreciated in the world for their authentic spirituality of humility and love for all.

The First Lady of Ukraine invited me to pay a visit to Kyiv with other spiritual leaders. That would be my dream and I pray for it.

Your faithful people, in their great majority belonging to the Orthodox Church, advance these days though the period of Lent towards the great celebration of Easter. I saw that on such occasions you have also joined your people in their joyful celebrations.

I was always impressed by how your people celebrate that Great Feast. On Easter night, there is a special Orthodox hymn which in the tradition of your people has a special resonance and expression: "This is the day of resurrection. Let us be illumined by the feast. Let us embrace each other. Let us call as "brothers" even those that hate us, and forgive all by the resurrection, and so let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life".

When this hymn is being sung, the bells of churches are ringing, and all people embrace, kiss one another and ask for forgiveness.

I would love to celebrate with both of you this year the Feast of Easter in Kyiv; to embrace one another, to ask for forgiveness', to affirm a long lasting peace, of support and respect of one another.

Together with all your faithful people, I pray that God sends upon you the power of His Holy Spirit, to melt, change and heat your hearts with the flame of His love and that for one another.

With deep respect and consideration,

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca  
Acting General Secretary  
World Council of Churches

## Appendix V

### Church Response to Refugees, “I’m Seeing the Image of God in You”

24 March 2022

*After a delegation from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and ACT Alliance visited Hungary, Romania and Ukraine last week, the group came away with reflections on how churches are making a difference in the lives of thousands upon thousands of people fleeing the war.*

WCC deputy general secretary Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri said she saw a confirmation of what we have been taught before: that churches are usually the first responders to any crisis in the world. “What I’ve also seen is the people are emphasizing the fact that we belong to the same faith, and we are the same people, so they are looking at the Ukrainians as one of them,” she said. “You see people treating the refugees with so much respect.”

As churches help refugees, they give people the impression that they are responding as people of faith. “I’m seeing the Christ in you, the image of God in you, and I treat you with dignity,” said Phiri, who also expressed special concern for black people in Ukraine who are also trying to flee from the war.

“There are many migrants who are not Ukrainians and who need help,” she said.



## Appendix W

### Youth Across the World Voice Prayers for the People of Ukraine

24 March 2022

*Youth from the World Council of Churches (WCC) ECHOS Commission on Youth from different parts of the world met online to raise their voices in prayer and hope in light of the current situation in Ukraine.*

They lifted their voices in a joint prayer of intercession saying:

“We ask for safety, wisdom and compassion for all working, to alleviate suffering and heal the wounded.”

“We give thanks for the proactive response of churches to work in situations of war and unrest in order to meet the needs of others.”

“We pray for the young people, separated families, for those who are refugees of the war in foreign countries and for those who are travelling to safety.”

Youth also shared about how their community and churches are responding to the situation.

“As an Orthodox Christian and a member of the Youth Commission of the WCC, I deeply mourn the loss of all innocent lives in the tragic internecine strife that has been taking place since 2014. Human dignity will always remain an essential value, no matter whether someone speaks Ukrainian or Russian, and lives in Kiev or in Donbas”, said Philip Champion, a youth representative from the Russian Orthodox Church.

“I ask our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), to soften the hearts of all rulers who have the power to end the current military confrontation”, Champion added.

Dianet Martínez Valdés from Cuba said that “we cannot remain indifferent to the pain of those who suffer from conflict and war, especially those who are the most vulnerable: children, women, young people, elderly, sick people and people with disabilities. Therefore, it is our commitment not to remain silent and speak out for peace and the immediate end of the war.”

Maria Mountraki from the Orthodox Church of Finland also shared about how her church in Finland is responding, saying: “Our church has been actively taking part in peace appeals, and we made pilgrimages from different churches around the Helsinki area to the Ukrainian Embassy to show solidarity. We also invited the Lutheran churches to join and ring church bells in the area and over 300 people took part.”

Emily Evans, a WCC executive committee member from the Uniting Church in Australia, said the gathering was a show of Christian unity. “Being from Australia, I often have felt removed from the events that are happening in Ukraine and surrounding countries or very far away,” she said. “Last night’s gathering reminded me that as a member of a global fellowship of churches that we are joining with Christians around the world in prayer, as we unitedly pray for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.”

## Appendix X

### Message from the WCC Round Table on Ukraine

30 March 2022

“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” (Psalm 85:10)

At this time of war in Ukraine and widening divisions in the world, senior representatives of WCC member churches from several European countries neighbouring and directly affected by the current conflict gathered in Bossey, Switzerland, on 30 March 2022 upon the invitation of the Acting General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The purpose of this meeting was to consult among us, to share perspectives on the conflict and its causes, and to discern possible paths forward for the churches together in working for peace in the midst of war. We regret that it was not possible for the representatives from Russia and Ukraine to travel to join us for this consultation, though they had accepted the invitation to do so.

We participants in this meeting collectively affirm – in line with the mandate and policy of the WCC – our rejection of war as against the will of God, and of the use of deadly military force as a means of resolving disputes – in Ukraine or anywhere else. Such disputes could and should be resolved peacefully, by sincere and meaningful dialogue and negotiations. We denounce the military aggression launched by the leadership of the Russian Federation against the people of the sovereign nation of Ukraine. We affirm the right of the people of Ukraine to defend themselves against this aggression. We grieve for all the precious lives already lost on both sides – each one of them so dear to God and to their loved ones – and for the terrible destruction and displacement of people and communities already caused.

We lift up the compassionate care and support offered to the Ukrainian refugees by the authorities, local communities, churches and church-related organizations in neighbouring and other countries, as a good example of the care and support all refugees fleeing from every such threat to life and dignity should receive.

We join in calling for a cease-fire in Ukraine, for humanitarian corridors to be opened and respected, and for sustained negotiations for a secure and just peace, to bring an end to this suffering.

We call urgently for recognition, respect, and protection of the God-given human dignity of every human being in harm's way due to this or any other armed conflict, and appeal especially for the protection of all civilians and civilian infrastructure as a matter of fundamental moral duty, as well as a responsibility under international humanitarian law. All those responsible for violations of applicable laws and crimes against humanity must be held fully accountable for their actions.

Beyond the borders of Ukraine, and beyond the new diaspora of its displaced and suffering people, we are also gravely concerned about the even wider, longer-term consequences of this unjustifiable aggression. The global food security crisis, already acute as a result of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, will now be vastly more severe, affecting especially the poorest and most vulnerable countries and communities of the world. Moreover, at this time when the whole world should be uniting in response to the common existential challenge of the looming climate catastrophe, the outrageous immorality of Russia's attack on its neighbour is greatly amplified.

We share the strong conviction that there is no legitimate way in which this armed aggression and its terrible consequences can be justified or tolerated from the perspective of our most fundamental Christian faith principles.

Acutely conscious of the grave risks of further escalation of the violence in Ukraine, of wider and even more destructive conflict, and of the abhorrent threat of weapons of mass destruction, we appeal for diplomacy instead of threats, dialogue instead of confrontation and exclusion, truth instead of disinformation, and for the voice of conscience - inspired by God's will for all the people of God and God's unique creation - to be heard.

As leaders of Christian communities facing this conflict and its consequences, and aware that sister churches hold different perspectives on the conflict's root causes, we stress the importance of the WCC as the ecumenical movement's leading instrument for sharing divergent perspectives, struggling with our differences, and seeking reconciliation and unity in word and deed to which our faith calls us. We join in fervent prayer for peace in Ukraine, in Europe and in the whole world, for the transformation of hearts and minds presently fixated on confrontation and violence, and for a turning to the path of peace where our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ leads us.

We affirm the role of the WCC as a platform for ecumenical dialogue in the midst of such tragic conflict and political divisions, and the critical need for such dialogue - including with our counterparts from Russia and Ukraine - in this difficult context. We acknowledge the calling of churches and of the ecumenical movement to be peace-makers, and mutually commit to continuing to meet and to work together for justice and peace, counting on the good offices of the WCC to continue to convene us and enable our intent. We ask the WCC Acting General Secretary to renew his invitation to the WCC member churches in Russia and Ukraine to join us in another roundtable discussion as soon as possible.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

Rev. Prof Dr Ioan Sauca (convener)

Acting General Secretary, World Council of Churches

H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Nifon of Targoviste

Diocese of Targoviste (Romanian Orthodox Church)

Rt Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

Presiding Bishop, Church of Norway

Prälat Dr. Martin Dutzmann

Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland

H.E. Archbishop Dr Vicken Aykazian

Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church

Archbishop Urmas Viilma

Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

Rev. Dr Kimmo Kääriäinen

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Mgr. Ivan El'ko

General Bishop, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia

Bishop Zoltán Balog

Ministerial President of the Synod, Reformed Church in Hungary



Appendix Y

Online Resources from the Conference  
of European Churches (CEC)

CEC website

<https://www.ceceurope.org/>

Ukraine

<https://www.ceceurope.org/church-response-to-ukraine/>



## Appendix Z

### Related WCC Publications

*Walking Together - Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, 2018, Edited by: Fernando Enns and Susan Durber

What does it mean to go on pilgrimage? And further: what does it mean for Christians around the world to understand their discipleship in terms of pilgrimage in God's realm of justice and peace?

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/walking-together>

*Pilgrims on the Path of Peace - The Journey of the WCC from Busan to Karlsruhe*, 2022

For each WCC Assembly, the WCC central committee submits an accountability report, describing and offering an assessment of the activities of the WCC between the assemblies; in this case, since the 10th Assembly, in Busan, Republic of Korea, in late 2013. The report "Pilgrims on the Path of Peace – The Journey of the WCC from Busan to Karlsruhe," is now available online for WCC member churches, ecumenical partners, and other global pilgrims. The WCC central committee received the report in February 2022.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/pilgrims-on-the-path-of-peace>

*Come and See—A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*. 2019

Faith and Order Paper No. 224.

This document invites the churches to explore the ways that "pilgrimage" can help the churches deepen and express the commitment to oneness in their work.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/come-and-see>

*Hosanna! Ecumenical Songs for Justice and Peace*, 2016

Inspired by the WCC's 10th Assembly, these songs of praise, adoration, struggle, mission, faith and hope constitute a deep resource for the pilgrimage of justice and peace. They are here published in English, French, Spanish,

and German, with other languages, introduced by Andrew Donaldson, and augmented by recorded performances available online.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/hosanna-ecumenical-songs-for-justice-and-peace>

Other regional Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace publications

<https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/pilgrimage-justice-and-peace#regional-publications>

A full list of WCC publications is available here:

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications>

## Appendix AA

### European Regional Pre-Assembly: A virtual gathering on the theme 'Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity'

25-26 February 2022

Tragically overshadowed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Regional Pre-assembly offered a space for churches in Europe to come together to discuss common issues, reflect on what it means to be church in Europe today, and what that means for a WCC Assembly hosted in Europe. As the gathering discussed a variety of issues in different geographical and ecclesial contexts, themes of reconciliation, secularity, and unity threaded together into a rich tapestry of common understanding and vision.

At the start of the Pre-Assembly, the attack against Ukraine was under way and 100,000 citizens had already moved to the Polish border and the borders of the neighbouring countries.<sup>1</sup> The theme of the WCC Assembly "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity", acquired a new urgency, which set the tone for the virtual gathering: the unity of the Church and the unity of the world belong together. This is an apocalyptic moment in the sense that churches and ecumenical organisations are being called to concrete action and challenged to take a stance.

As participants listened to the responses of churches to the war in Ukraine, questions of unity, interconnectedness, and reconciliation came to the fore. Europe's churches and societies are intertwined and inter-dependent, underlining the importance of solidarity towards the suffering member of the one body (1 Cor. 12:26). It became evident that the war will impact the way churches in Europe prepare for the WCC Assembly, and consequently the Assembly itself. Churches in Ukraine are demonstrating unity at a time of great division. But the conflict raises questions about intra-Orthodox unity, and the unity of the WCC fellowship with its member churches in Russia.

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1. According to the UNHCR, The UN Refugee Service, 6,659,220 persons fled Ukraine by 25 May 2022. See refugee influx in neighbouring countries on <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

While reflecting on the theme of the 11th WCC Assembly, secularity and increased plurality were discussed as the societal contexts in which churches in Europe fulfil their mission of reconciliation and unity. In some areas, there is pushback against a culturally Christian society, accompanied by growing religious illiteracy. There is a general trend of people moving away from institutional religion, although there is a corresponding surge in those seeking spirituality. This increasing secularisation has resulted in a diminution of the role of the Church within society. This loss is perceived as a tragedy by many within churches, along with a determination to try to resist or even reverse this decline. Others stress that secularisation is not the biggest issue for our churches – there are other problems both in Europe and around the world on which churches should focus their time and energy.

It is often difficult to discern or communicate a Christian voice in a largely secular public space, and churches themselves can struggle to translate God's message into the language of secular society. The space of religion in society can itself be controversial at times, as politicians use religion to further their own particular agendas. But Christ did not call us to be the establishment – God calls us to be more faithful to what Christ challenged us to be. Churches have a valuable message to share on issues such as freedom of religion, civil rights, and migration, a message that is (or should be) rooted in the diaconal calling of the churches. Churches are the salt of the earth and the yeast of the bread – often unseen, but integral elements of a greater whole. It is our role to show that we are the salt and yeast, as we navigate a secular society with humility, honesty, self-commitment to witness and confidence in the public domain.

The theme of the 11th WCC Assembly is Christocentric and missional, but not exclusivist. Christ's love, radical compassion and solidarity with those who suffer, is at the centre of the reflections and preparations of churches for the Assembly. The proposed 'ecumenism of the heart' plays a particularly important role in churches' efforts towards the visible unity of the Church and the strengthening of the work of reconciliation. Case studies discussed during the Pre-Assembly demonstrated that a) churches can play a significant role as mediators in our communities and in promoting reconciliation through their fundamental unity in Christ, whilst recognising that people exist in a variety of different cultural and social settings, and b) reconciliation needs to be based on an understanding of justice. In both cases, there cannot be reconciliation without a true understanding of justice, and there cannot be peace without a just peace.

In the mediating role, the churches are demonstrating their value by being safe places where differing parties can come together to seek reconciliation. We can come to the table with the intent for peace – it should be a priority to raise the prophetic voice of the churches, and to call for peace and justice. But speaking of Christ’s love cannot bypass the truth – we must be aware of the world into which we preach. How do we provide spiritual leadership in an apocalyptic moment? “Those who love peace must organise as effectively as those who love war.” *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The Pre-Assembly looked at examples of harassment, tribalism, intra-church conflict, colonialism, and the treatment of indigenous peoples within and by churches. The churches have not always been a safe space for everyone, and nor are they now. Participants in the Pre-Assembly also stressed the need to be aware of Euro-centric attitudes and listen to those who have been hurt. At times, so-called Christian values can mislead the churches and Christian people; for instance, if they keep silent in the face of atrocities. Churches need to be self-critical of their failings as, without this self-examination, no ecumenism can be of purpose. Therefore, the task facing churches is to take ownership of their sins of the past (and present), and actively look to be transformed.

While reflecting on increased plurality in society and the Church, Pre-Assembly participants focused on ways of coming together to discuss controversial issues and agree on common actions. The usual church parliamentary style of producing papers and statements for discussion and adoption is not wholly suitable when dealing with controversial issues; it often results in making opposing positions visible and more cemented. It is important that people with differing views are encouraged to come together in the same room over an extended length of time in order to build trust and seek peace. The kind of atmosphere that develops in the room is often most significant. Love and respect will pave the way for change and understanding. Without an atmosphere of peace and kindness, the acts of listening and finding common ground are impossible. So, churches need to think counterintuitively and find “non-strategic” ways of approaching each other in the spirit of receptive ecumenism. For it is only ecumenically that churches can meet the challenges facing them.

Churches in Europe are part of the worldwide movement of transformation, aware of their responsibilities and strongly committed to the work of global unity and reconciliation. They are neither resigned nor inactive. The witness of young people is particularly strong in calling churches to action, and this

has been evidenced over recent years, particularly in the struggle for climate justice. The Church's call to discipleship implies that a) churches are learning communities: they need to be open to change and transformation, b) churches are healing communities: they need to be able to address wounds of the past and present, and c) churches are agents of hope: in the midst of hopelessness, they experience and share the joy of Christian faith.

Although the war against Ukraine is a new shock to Europe that churches and Christians are grappling with, the city of Karlsruhe continues its preparations to host the WCC Assembly. The city, set on the banks of the Rhine near the French-German border, is a witness to a long history of reconciliation after World War II, and is an example of cross-border dialogue and reconciliation in Europe. Churches in Europe hope that the upcoming Assembly will be a truly intergenerational, interconnected, and prophetic Assembly, prepared by local communities as they reflect on the biblical stories of Jesus' compassion. They hope that this Assembly will be an ecumenical boost for Europe that will strengthen the role of ecumenism and religion's role in our societies.

*Note:*

*The European Pre-Assembly was attended by 199 delegates and other participants. The meeting was originally to have taken place in Warsaw, Poland, but convened online due to Covid-19 restrictions.*

*The Pre-Assembly report was prepared by Rev. Serge Fornerod, Protestant Church in Switzerland (convener), Ms Maria Mountraki, Orthodox Church of Finland, Ms. Katerina Pekridou, Executive Secretary for theological dialogue, CEC, Rev. Matthew Ross, Programme Executive – Diakonia and Capacity Building, WCC, Rev. Dr Hana Tonzarova, Czechoslovak Hussite Church, and Ms Miriam Weibye, Church of Scotland (drafter).*

## Contributors

**Note:** Chapter 1.6 is an anonymous contribution from a participant in a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace event held in Plön, Germany, in September 2015.

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# Seek Peace and Pursue It

## Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Europe

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is intended to be an expression of international solidarity with people, particularly those in difficult circumstances.

This publication looks at work done directly within the context of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in Europe, as well as justice and peace issues promoted by churches that complement the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace agenda.

In the first section, the publication provides an overview of Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace events in Europe, offering reflections on some of the ways in which churches and ecumenical organizations were challenged and inspired and sharing stories and insights about the pilgrimage in Europe

Section 2 does not necessarily represent official parts of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace but contains essays on issues of justice and peace in Europe from individuals working with churches and ecumenical partners across Europe, intended to stimulate debate, interest, and international comparison.

The Appendix includes additional resources, including statements from the WCC on the use of armed force to resolve disputes that could be resolved by dialogue.

“The joy of the pilgrimage is that it really is aiming to be rooted in mutual accompaniment—and that means no white saviours, no recreation of colonial obligations and expectations, no collusion with present power and economic imbalances.”

- Rev. Dr Susan Durber



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