

18. The World Council of Churches: 10th Assembly

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Subject and Aims	To raise awareness of the World Council of Churches, its most recent Assembly, and the opportunities membership of the Council offers.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) met from 30 October to 8 November 2013 in Busan, on the south east coast of the Republic of Korea. The theme of the Assembly took the form of a prayer: God of life, lead us to justice and peace.¹ More than 3,000 participants gathered representing more than 300 churches from more than 100 countries; some were from churches that are not members of the World Council (eg, the Roman Catholic Church and The Salvation Army), some were from organisations such as Christian Aid, and some were of other faiths.
- 1.2. In the words of its constitution, “The World Council is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”
- 1.3. The Assembly meets, on average, every seven years and “has the mandate to set the future agenda of the council, to elect governance officials and to speak with a public voice on behalf of the churches. It is also a unique moment for the whole fellowship of member churches to come together in prayer and celebration”². Reports on previous Assemblies have usually been made both to the preceding and succeeding Conferences.

2. The 10th Assembly

- 2.1. In 2012, the Conference appointed Mrs Sarah Friswell and the Revd Neil Stubbens to be its representatives to the 10th Assembly of the WCC. Since returning, both have shared their experiences of and reflections on the Assembly and the vision and work of the World Council; this has included speaking at the World Mission Forum, a number of locally arranged ecumenical meetings, the District Ecumenical Officers’ Meeting, and the Connexional Team Meeting.
- 2.2. Before the Assembly began there was a Virtual Conference for Youth on 12 October³ and then, in Busan on 28-29 October, pre-assemblies for the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN), Indigenous Peoples, Women and Men, and Youth.
- 2.3. The Assembly and each day of it began and ended in prayer; morning prayer took an ecumenical form and evening prayer followed the form of a particular tradition. There were 21 Bible study groups meeting each morning discussing texts focused on moments in biblical history in which life was threatened yet, by God’s grace, justice and peace prevailed. The authors of the studies included women and men from diverse contexts and traditions in all the continents and remain available to be downloaded.⁴

¹ See wcc2013.info/en for reports, photographs, and videos.

² www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/events/10th-assembly-of-the-world-council-of-churches

³ wcc2013.info/en/news-media/all-news/youth-addresses-community-issues-in-a-virtual-conference

⁴ www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/bible-studies

- 2.4. There were also 21 ecumenical conversations: exploring a variety of subjects from 'Evangelism today: new ways for authentic discipleship' to *A call to ecological justice and peace in the face of climate change* and from *Churches' advocacy for children's rights* to *Ecumenical health and healing ministries*. The results of the conversations will help to guide future ecumenical cooperation and the work of the WCC.
- 2.5. Thematic plenaries on Asia, mission, unity, justice, and peace were held in a large theatre and the business plenaries in a large hall. The former provided opportunities for celebration and inspiration as well as the presentation of some of the global challenges facing the churches. The latter received reports from the Assembly's various committees, dealt with amendments to the WCC's Constitution, made appointments, and agreed the Assembly Message,⁵ the Unity Statement⁶ and statements on public issues.⁷
- 2.6. Some of the statements on public issues had been drafted before the Assembly began; others were requested on its opening day. The following statements on public issues were agreed by the Assembly and have been drawn to the attention of the Joint Public Issues Team:
- PIC 02.1 Statement on the politicisation of religion and rights of religious minorities
 - PIC 02.2 Statement on the human rights of stateless people
 - PIC 02.3 Statement on peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula
 - PIC 02.4 Statement on the way to just peace
 - PIC 02.5 Minute on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo
 - PIC 02.6 Statement affirming the presence and witness of Christians in the Middle East
 - PIC 02.7 Minute on the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide
 - PIC 02.8 Statement on the current critical situation of Abeyi in South Sudan
 - PIC 02.9 Statement on moving towards a nuclear-free world
 - PIC 02.10 Resolution on urging improved United States-Cuba relations and the lifting of economic sanctions
 - PIC 02.11 Minute on Indigenous Peoples
 - PIC 02.12 Minute on climate change
- 2.7. Alongside the Assembly there was *madang*. "*Madang* is a Korean term that denotes a courtyard in a traditional Korean house. The *madang* serves as a space for encounter and sharing, celebration and fellowship, greeting a visitor and welcoming a stranger." The *madang* programme included more than 80 workshops and more than 100 exhibitions and encounter spaces.
- 2.8. The programme for the middle weekend had a twin focus: first, exposure visits to encounter the history, culture, society and life struggle of the Korean people; secondly, sharing in worship with Korean congregations.

⁵ See Appendix 1 of this report; this document has been distributed to the district ecumenical officers.

⁶ See Appendix 2 of this report; this document has been distributed to the district ecumenical officers.

⁷ See www.wcc2013.info/en/news-media/all-news/wcc-assembly-addresses-contemporary-public and www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements

- 2.9. Eight new Presidents were appointed, one for each WCC 'region'. The European President is Archbishop Andres Wejryd of the Church of Sweden and there is one President from the Methodist family, the Revd Dr Mele'ana Puloaka for the Pacific Region.
- 2.10. The new Central Committee has far fewer Methodists on it. Those appointed to the Central Committee from the Britain and Ireland sub-region include four Anglicans (one each from the Church in Wales and the Church of Ireland, and two from the Church of England), one from the Church of Scotland, and one from the URC.
- 2.11. The Assembly gave an opportunity for representatives from each region and each 'confession' to meet.

3. Some reflections on the Assembly and the on-going engagement of the Methodist Church with the WCC

- 3.1. All those attending the Assembly were aware that they met in the context of a divided Korean peninsula. The desire of many Koreans for reunification and the marks of a number of occupations of Korea by other nations (including the so-called 'comfort women' under Japan in the Second World War) were very apparent.
- 3.2. The welcome and hospitality of the host churches and organisers were generous. The care and efficiency of the stewards were remarkable. Sharing with sisters and brothers in Christ from such a variety of backgrounds was a reminder of the vision in the book of Revelation in which St John sees a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, praising God.
- 3.3. It has to be acknowledged, however, that the World Council of Churches has its detractors; for example, the daily protests outside the Assembly venue made it clear that not all Korean churches welcomed the presence of the WCC. Reflecting on his visit to the Assembly, the Archbishop of Canterbury told the General Synod of the Church of England:

Earlier this month I was at the World Council of Churches in Busan in South Korea. If I'm being really honest, I confess to being surprised, having believed the propaganda about the uselessness of such events, yet being confounded by the reality of a world-church-gathering seeking to express love for Christ and for each other. I shall believe less propaganda in future. The WCC certainly has its issues of unity and coherence, but then who doesn't; but it holds together an extraordinary diversity, united in the main by love for Jesus Christ.⁸

- 3.4. The WCC offers a vision and resources to inspire Christian disciples in worship and mission. For many Methodists, the most obvious link with the WCC is probably the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: each year the resources are jointly prepared by the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC and the Pontifical Council for the Promoting Christian Unity.
- 3.5. In connection with Korea itself, the Methodist Church is already working through the WCC and with partner churches and Christian bodies on a number of the challenges from the Assembly. On New Year's Eve, for example, along with German Churches, the United Church of Canada, and Korean Churches, a shipment of 100 tons of food was sent from our partner in China to the many starving people in North Korea. This was possible only thanks to the funds given to the World Mission Fund by Methodist people in Britain and to churches from around the world working together through the WCC. In its Statement on Peace and Reunification of the

⁸ www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5187/watch-archbishop-justins-presentation-to-the-general-synod

Korean Peninsula, the Assembly called on member churches to pray with the peoples and churches of Korea by designating 10 August 2014, the Sunday before 15 August (the anniversary of Korean liberation from Japanese occupation), as the 'Sunday of Prayer for the Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula'.

3.6. A number of documents served as resources for the Assembly and are readily available for the use of member churches.⁹ These include:

- *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*
- *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*
- *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*
- *Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All: A Call to Action*
- *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace*
- *Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century*
- *Ecumenical Covenant on Theological Education.*

3.7. District policy committees are responsible for communicating the concerns and encouraging the study of the reports of various ecumenical instruments, including the WCC.¹⁰ In the post-Busan meeting arranged by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, consideration was given to how the themes of the Assembly and the work of the WCC relate to the Churches in Britain and Ireland.

3.8. One of the opportunities for young people to engage with the WCC is the stewards programme which is run in connection with each meeting of the Central Committee and Assembly.¹¹

4. Conclusion

4.1. Having prayed, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace", the 10th Assembly of the WCC began its Message with an invitation: "Join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace" and, in the Unity Statement, urged the member churches "to remain committed to the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches:"

to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

18/1. The Conference received the Report.

18/2. The Conference commended the Message and the Unity Statement of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches to Local Churches, Circuits, and Districts for study, discussion, and appropriate action, wherever possible with ecumenical partners.

⁹ These documents are available individually or as the first part of the *Resource Book* for the 10th Assembly from www.wcc2013.info/en/resources/documents/preparatory-documents

¹⁰ SO 434(3)(ii).

¹¹ See www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/youth/stewards

Appendix 1: Message of the 10th Assembly of the WCC¹

Join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

*By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.
Luke 1:78-79*

Dear Sisters and Brothers, we greet you in the name of Christ.

1. We gathered in the Republic of Korea at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (30 October – 8 November 2013). Coming from 345 member churches of the fellowship and from partner organizations in the ecumenical movement, we joined in prayer, shared stories from our local communities and took to heart strong messages of agony and hope. We are thankful for the many engaging statements released. Our common pilgrimage traced the theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.”
2. In the city of Busan, we journeyed together on a road of transformation – we pray that as we are being transformed ourselves, God will make us instruments of peace. Many of us travelled to other parts of Korea where we witnessed the open wounds of a society torn by conflict and division. How necessary is justice for peace; reconciliation for healing; and a change of heart for the world to be made whole! We were encouraged by the active and committed churches we encountered; their work bears bountiful fruit.
3. We share our experience of the search for unity in Korea as a sign of hope in the world. This is not the only land where people live divided, in poverty and richness, happiness and violence, welfare and war. We are not allowed to close our eyes to harsh realities or to rest our hands from God’s transforming work. As a fellowship, the World Council of Churches stands in solidarity with the people and the churches in the Korean peninsula, and with all who strive for justice and peace.
4. God our Creator is the source of all life. In the love of Jesus Christ and by the mercy of the Holy Spirit we, as a communion of the children of God, move together towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom. Seeking grace from God we are called, in our diversity, to be just stewards of God’s Creation. This is the vision of the New Heaven and Earth, where Christ will “fill all in all” (Ephesians 1.23).
5. We live in a time of global crises. Economic, ecological, socio-political and spiritual challenges confront us. In darkness and in the shadow of death, in suffering and persecution, how precious is the gift of hope from the Risen Lord! By the flame of the Spirit in our hearts, we pray to Christ to brighten the world: for his light to turn our whole beings to caring for the whole of creation and to affirm that all people are created in God’s image. Listening to voices that often come from the margins, let us all share lessons of hope and perseverance. Let us recommit ourselves to work for liberation and to act in solidarity. May the illuminating Word of God guide us on our journey.

¹ The Message was approved by the Assembly with the following dissenting opinions:

Archimandrite Jack Khalil of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East wished to register his dissent to the use of the word “transformation” in two places in the message, on the theological ground that as Christians our transformation is already completed in our baptism. Metropolitan Bishoy of Damietta wished to register his dissent to the phrase “all people are created”, having preferred it to say “were created”.

6. 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.

*Blessed are they who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times!*

Psalm 106:3

God of life, lead us to justice and peace!

Appendix 2: Unity Statement

God's Gift and Call to Unity - and our Commitment

1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)." Creation is a gift from the living God. We celebrate creation's life in its diversity and give thanks for its goodness. It is the will of God that the whole creation, reconciled in the love of Christ through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, should live together in unity and peace (Eph. 1).

Our experience

2. Today, the whole creation, the world and its people, live in the tension between the profoundest hope and the deepest despair. We give thanks for the diversity of human cultures, for the wonder of knowledge and learning, for the enthusiasm and vibrancy of many young people, for communities being rebuilt and enemies reconciled, for people being healed, and populations fed. We rejoice when people of different faiths work together for justice and peace. These are signs of hope and new beginnings. But we grieve that there are also places where God's children cry out. Social and economic injustice, poverty and famine, greed and war ravage our world. There is violence and terrorism and the threat of war, particularly nuclear war. Many have to live with HIV and AIDS and suffer from other epidemics; peoples are displaced and their lands dispossessed. Many women and children are victims of violence, inequality and trafficking as are some men. There are those who are marginalised and excluded. We are all in danger of being alienated from our cultures and disconnected from earth. Creation has been misused and we face threats to the balance of life, a growing ecological crisis and the effects of climate change. These are signs of our disordered relations with God, with one another and with creation, and we confess that they dishonour God's gift of life.
3. Within churches we experience a similar tension between celebration and sorrow. There are signs of vibrant life and creative energy in the growth of Christian communities around the world with rich diversity. There is a deepening sense among some churches of needing one another and of being called by Christ to be in unity. In places where churches experience anguish and constant fear of persecution, solidarity between Christians from different traditions in the service of justice and peace is a sign of God's grace. The ecumenical movement has encouraged new friendships forming a seed bed in which unity can grow. There are places where Christians work and witness together in their local communities and new regional agreements of covenanting, closer fellowship and church unions. Increasingly, we recognize that we are called to share with, and learn from, those of other faiths, to work with them in common efforts for justice and peace and for the preservation of the integrity of God's beautiful but hurting creation. These deepening relationships bring new challenges and enlarge our understanding.

4. We grieve that there are also painful experiences of situations where diversity has turned into division and we do not always recognise the face of Christ in each other. We cannot all gather together around the Table in Eucharistic communion. Divisive issues remain. New issues bring sharp challenges which create new divisions within and between churches. These must be addressed in the fellowship of churches by the way of consensus discernment. Too easily we withdraw into our own traditions and communities refusing to be challenged and enriched by the gifts others hold out to us. Sometimes we seem to embrace the creative new life of faith and yet do not embrace a passion for unity or a longing for fellowship with others. This makes us more ready to tolerate injustice and even conflicts between and within the churches. We are held back as some grow weary and disappointed on the ecumenical path.
5. We do not always honour the God who is the source of our life. Whenever we abuse life through our practices of exclusion and marginalization, our refusal to pursue justice, our unwillingness to live in peace, our failure to seek unity, and our exploitation of creation, we reject the gifts God holds out to us.

Our shared scriptural vision

6. As we read the Scriptures together, under the guidance of the Spirit, our eyes are opened to the place of the community of God's people within creation. Men and women are created in the image and likeness of God and given the responsibility to care for life (Gen. 1:27-28). The covenant with Israel marks a decisive moment in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. The prophets call God's covenanted people to work for justice and peace, to care for the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized, and to be a light to the nations (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 49:6).
7. God sent Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God (John 1). Through his ministry and through his death on the cross Jesus destroyed the walls of separation and hostility, established a new covenant, and brought about genuine unity and reconciliation in his own Body (Eph. 1:9-10 and 2:14-16). He announced the coming Kingdom of God, had compassion on the crowds, healed the sick and preached good news to the poor (Math. 9:35-36; Luke 4:14-24). He reached out to the despised, the sinners, the alien, offering acceptance, and redemption. By his life, death and resurrection, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus revealed the communion of the life of God the Holy Trinity, and opened to all a new way of living in communion with one another in the love of God (1 John 1:1-3). Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples for the sake of the world (John 17:20-24). He entrusted his message and his ministry of unity and reconciliation to his disciples and through them to the Church, which is called to continue his mission (2 Cor. 5: 18-20). From the beginning the community of believers lived together, were devoted to the apostolic teaching and fellowship, breaking bread and praying together, caring for the poor, proclaiming the good news and yet struggling with factions and divisions (Acts 2:42; Acts 15).
8. The Church, as the Body of Christ, embodies Jesus' uniting, reconciling and self-sacrificial love to the world on the cross. At the heart of God's own life of communion is forever a cross and forever resurrection – a reality which is revealed to us and through us. We pray and wait with eager longing for God to renew the whole creation (Rom. 8:19-21). God is always there ahead of us in our pilgrimage, always surprising us, calling us to repentance, forgiving our failures and offering us the gift of new life.

God's call to unity today

9. On our ecumenical journey we have come to understand more about God's call to the Church to serve the unity of all creation. The vocation of the Church is to be: foretaste of new creation; prophetic sign to the whole world of the life God intends for all; and servant spreading the good news of God's Kingdom of justice, peace and love.

10. As foretaste God gives to the Church gracious gifts: the Word, testified to in Holy Scripture to which we are invited to respond in faith in the power of the Holy Spirit; baptism in which we are made a new creation in Christ ; the Eucharist, the fullest expression of communion with God and with one another, which builds up the fellowship and from which we are sent out in mission; an apostolic ministry to draw out and nurture the gifts of all the faithful and to lead the mission of the Church. Conciliar gatherings too are gifts enabling the fellowship, under the Spirit's guidance, to discern the will of God, to teach together and to live sacrificially, serving one another's needs and the world's needs. The unity of the Church is not uniformity; diversity is also a gift, creative and life-giving. But diversity cannot be so great that those in Christ become strangers and enemies to one another, thus damaging the uniting reality of life in Christ.ⁱ

11. As prophetic sign the Church's vocation is to show forth the life that God wills for the whole creation. We are hardly a credible sign as long as our ecclesial divisions, which spring from fundamental disagreements in faith, remain. Divisions and marginalisation on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, disability, power, status, caste, and other forms of discrimination also obscure the Church's witness to unity. To be a credible sign our life together must reflect the qualities of patience, humility, generosity, attentive listening to one another, mutual accountability, inclusivity, and a willingness to stay together, not saying 'I have no need of you' (1 Cor. 12:21). We are called to be a community upholding justice in its own life, living together in peace, never settling for the easy peace that silences protest and pain, but struggling for the true peace that comes with justice. Only as Christians are being reconciled and renewed by God's Spirit will the Church bear authentic witness to the possibility of reconciled life for all people, for all creation. It is often in its weakness and poverty, suffering as Christ suffers, that the Church is truly sign and mystery of God's grace.ⁱⁱ

12. As servant the Church is called to make present God's holy, loving and life affirming plan for the world revealed in Jesus Christ. By its very nature the Church is missionary, called and sent to witness to the gift of communion that God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the Kingdom of God. In its work of holistic mission - evangelism and diakonia done in Christ's way - the Church participates in offering God's life to the world.ⁱⁱⁱ In the power of the Spirit, the Church is to proclaim the good news in ways that awaken a response in different contexts, languages and cultures, to pursue God's justice, and to work for God's peace. Christians are called to make common cause with people of other faiths or none wherever possible, for the well-being of all peoples and creation.

13. 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 plan of God made known to us in Christ is, in the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ, "things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:9-10)."

Our commitment

14. We affirm the place of the Church in God's design and repent of the divisions among and within our churches, confessing with sorrow that our disunity undermines our witness to the good news of Jesus Christ and makes less credible our witness to that unity God desires for all. We confess our failures to do justice, to work for peace, and to sustain creation. Despite our failings, God is faithful and forgiving and continues to call us to unity. Having faith in God's creating and re-creating power, we long for the Church to be foretaste, credible sign and effective servant of the new life that God is offering to the world. It is in God, who beckons us to life in all its fullness that joy, hope, and a passion for unity are renewed. Therefore, we urge one another to remain committed to the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches:

to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.^{iv}

We affirm the uniqueness of our fellowship and our conviction to pursue the visible unity of the Church together, thankful for our diversity and conscious of our need to grow in communion.

15. In faithfulness to this our common calling, we will seek together the full visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church when we shall express our unity around the one Table of the Lord. In pursuing the unity of the Church we will open ourselves to receive the gifts of each other's traditions, and offer our gifts to one another. We will learn to commemorate together the martyrs who witnessed to our common faith. We will continue theological conversations, giving attention to new voices and different methods of approach. We will seek to live out the consequences of our theological agreements. We will intensify our work for justice, peace and the healing of creation, and address together the complex challenges of contemporary social, economic and moral issues. We will work for more just, participatory and inclusive ways of living together. We will make common cause for the well-being of humanity and creation with those of other faith communities. We will hold each other accountable for fulfilling these commitments. Above all, we will pray without ceasing for the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17): a unity of faith, love and compassion that Jesus Christ brought through his ministry; a unity like the unity Christ shares with the Father; a unity enfolded in the communion of the life and love of the Triune God. Here, we receive the mandate for the Church's vocation for unity in mission and service.
16. We turn to God, the source of all life, and we pray:

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

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

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

ⁱⁱⁱ We are thankful for all we have learned through the Decade to Overcome Violence about just peace in God's way focused in *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace* from the Jamaica Peace Convocation; and all we have learned about mission in God's way, encapsulated in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism document, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*.

^{iv} *The Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches* as amended by the 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006; III: Purposes and Functions. We remember the words of the First WCC Assembly in 1948, 'Here at Amsterdam we have ... covenanted with one another in constituting this World Council of Churches. We intend to stay together.'