

## Report on the Eleventh General Assembly of the World Council of Churches Karlsruhe, Germany: 31 August - 8 September 2022

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*This report is deliberately concise but it does contain a number of hyperlinks to more detailed descriptions on the World Council of Churches website. A richer picture will be given through reading the report alongside this additional material.*

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Where could we experience Egyptian Coptic Christians worshipping alongside Chilean Methodists, Tongan Anglicans praying with Palestinian Lutherans, Greek Orthodox witnessing together with Korean Pentecostals? Where could we discover the richness of quite different liturgical traditions - from the *Kyrie eleison* of Kyiv to joyful cries for reconciliation from Brazil, from the haunting indigenous songs of the Arctic Sami people to the vibrant rhythms of South Africa, from the evocative melodies of Japan to the praise of the Caribbean?<sup>1</sup> Where could we join in conversations with others having daily routines very different from ours - some living in comfortable, prosperous democracies whilst others face conflict, instability, persecution, famine and the devastating effects of climate change? Where would we hear sincere expressions of solidarity, heartfelt cries for justice, longing calls for unity and the jubilant affirmations of faith in the face of fear?

The World Council of Churches (WCC) Eleventh General Assembly, held between 31 August and 8 September, in the lovely city of [Karlsruhe](#) in south-western Germany, gave us those blessings in abundance - and so much more. Since its [birth in 1948](#), following the trauma and destruction of war, the WCC's member churches have met in Christian fellowship [every eight years or so](#) for worship and witness and in pursuit of justice and unity. Representing 352 churches worldwide and more than half a billion Christians, the General Assembly is the WCC's highest level and most comprehensive gathering. It seeks to speak to a weary, violent, unequal world of the certain hope that God is making all things new in Christ and the Spirit. The theme of this Assembly - "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity" - called us to an 'ecumenism of the heart' that embraces the other and demands that fine theological thinking be matched by concrete, transformation action for this fragile planet and its people. Addresses from the outgoing [Central Committee Moderator](#), the [Acting General Secretary](#), the [German President](#) and many others offered stirring reflections on the Assembly theme and provided encouragement for challenges which lie ahead.

As we met in Germany we were conscious of multiple crises in our world. Members of the Orthodox Churches of both Ukraine and Russia were present as the Assembly statement [War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region](#) "[denounced] this illegal and unjustifiable war" and "[renewed] the call for an immediate ceasefire to halt the death and destruction, and for dialogue and negotiations to secure a sustainable peace." Reaching an agreed statement relating to tensions and violence in Israel and Palestine revealed divergent opinions, yet all were committed to connect the words to practical steps towards reconciliation, or, as the title of the statement affirmed, ["Seeking Justice and Peace for all in the Middle East."](#) The scope of the public issues committee was far broader than these highly visible conflicts, as calls for reconciliation resounded also concerning [West Papua](#), [Nagorno-Karabakh](#) and the [divided Korean peninsula](#), as well as a call to recognise the deaths of some half a million [Syriac-Aramaic Christians](#) in 1915 as genocide. Statements were adopted concerning racism, casteism, xenophobia, gender violence and discrimination - recognised as sins against God - as well as the need to pursue reconciliation with [indigenous people](#), some of whom were [delegated to the Assembly](#) or participated in one of the [pre-assemblies](#). The statement [The Things that make for Peace: Moving the World to Reconciliation and Unity](#) recommitted the global Christian family to peace-building

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<sup>1</sup> For a flavour of the Assembly worship see the WCC website; for example, [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

through dialogue and interreligious cooperation. The [Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace](#), initiated at the Tenth Assembly (Busan, 2013), was expanded in Karlsruhe into a [Pilgrimage of Peace, Reconciliation and Unity](#). There were also renewed calls for the [inclusion of all](#) and an end to gender-based violence through the well-established [Thursdays in Black](#) campaign.

Urgent efforts to address the [climate crisis](#) reverberated through the entire Assembly, in [worship, thematic plenaries](#) and in several greetings from church leaders. Some delegates reported how their churches were facing the horrors of melting ice, rising sea levels, prolonged drought, loss of biodiversity and increasingly erratic, sometimes destructive, weather patterns whilst others lamented governmental reluctance to take timely, bold, costly action. The final statement on climate change summoned us to a fundamental reorientation (*metanoia*), recognising that human greed, denial and apathy had led to chaotic imbalances which imperil the poorest and the most innocent, not to mention the land, the seas and the intricate web of natural life they sustain. Entitled [The Living Planet: Seeking a Just and Sustainable Global Community](#), the document calls for a rapid transition to renewable sources of energy, alongside a host of practical, achievable solutions, with the wealthiest and ablest taking the lead and with financial support to support those with lesser capacity. Recognising that "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1), the report affirmed that

human beings, created in God's own image, are called to serve as faithful and responsible caretakers of God's precious, unique creation, of which we are at the same time an inherent part and inextricably dependent on the health of the whole natural world.

Such demands for justice are intimately related to the [Unity Statement](#) which picked up the Assembly thematic emphasis on love. Being united in Christ's love announces a Christian vocation to love which responds dynamically to the world's debilitating problems. The delegates at Karlsruhe affirmed that "the true goal of Jesus Christ, and with him all Christians, is to reach a visible fellowship, one in holy unity". Far from representing a retreat from the world this requires a renewed commitment to respond to the world's fragility, vulnerability and pain with the desire for life-giving transformation. Such sentiments were echoed in messages of greeting and encouragement from Christian leaders - including the [Pope, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew](#) and the [Archbishop of Canterbury](#) - and those of other faith communities, as well as civic and political leaders.

It is important, however, to note that the Assembly is more than words. [The report of the Acting General Secretary](#) recounted the actions and campaigns of the WCC over the last eight years, while the Assembly itself set ambitious goals for the work of the Council over the next eight years leading up to the twelfth Assembly which is scheduled for 2030.

In [electing a president](#) from each of the eight regions (including the [Pacific, North America and Europe](#)), a [Central Committee](#) of 150 persons (including our own Bishop Gregory), a [Central Committee Moderator](#) and a smaller [Executive Committee](#), efforts were made to include a just, representative diversity to oversee the WCC's work from this assembly to the next. It was acknowledged that work needs to be done to [increase youth representation](#) to address the concerns expressed during the assembly. If the goals outlined above are realised the world will be more sustainable, compassionate and equal and all will be able to discover Christ's promise of life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

This will entail a costly, yet exhilarating, journey with Christ who calls us onwards as his disciples with a proclamation for the world. Each General Assembly issues a [Message](#) and this time its committee - moderated by Bishop Gregory - picked up key aspects of the assembly themes. We are reminded that we are called to move - both towards God and each other - a journey made possible as God in Christ moves towards us in reconciling, sanctifying love. Indeed

in Christ, all things will be made new. His love which is open to all, including the last, the least, and the lost, and is offered to all, can move and empower us in a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity.

Together with our sisters and brothers represented at the Assembly, we pray for the Spirit's grace to embrace that holy calling, trusting that the love of Christ may indeed move us to reconciliation and unity.

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The Church in Wales was represented at the General Assembly by the following:

The Rt. Rev'd. Gregory Cameron, Bishop of St. Asaph, with Bench portfolio for ecumenism;

Mrs Mandy Bayton, Bishop's Officer for Evangelism & Outreach for the Diocese of Swansea & Brecon;

The Rev'd. Canon Dr Ainsley Griffiths, Director of Faith, Order and Unity.

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*The full text of the Assembly Message is reproduced below. We kindly request that this Message be widely used in our Churches to acquaint the Church in Wales of the work of the WCC.*

**World Council of Churches 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly**  
**31 August - 8 September 2022**  
**Karlsruhe, Germany**

**Report of the Message Committee Rev**

**Introductory Note**

Every assembly of the World Council of Churches has released a message to convey the experience of the assembly and the inspirational nature of its work. We offer this message to be read in every congregation of our member churches, and published in all church media. We hope this message may be widely translated and used. It would be good to see it discussed and dissected, pondered over, and prayed over, because it represents the deliberations and prayers of over 4000 people who participated in the assembly, as we seek the unity Christ offers. We entrust this message now to you, asking you to hand it on to all Christians and people of goodwill, that together we might unite in discovering how Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.

**A Call to Act Together**

*"The Love of Christ urges us on." (2 Cor. 5:14, NRSV)*

**"Come, follow me!"**

1. From the time he journeyed on earth, and even in this present moment, Jesus unceasingly addresses these words to every human being. Jesus' life, words, and actions are a constant invitation to movement - from one physical place to another, from one group of people to another, from one mindset to another. Above all, amid the problems of the world, Jesus calls us to come to him and to abide in his love, a love which is offered for all the world (cf. Matt. 11:28).
2. The very last book of the Bible, Revelation, speaks of ancient forces of human suffering at work in the world: war, death, disease, and famine. As the assembly of the World Council of Churches gathered in Karlsruhe in 2022, we were conscious of their manifestations in the world today. In their wake come injustice and discrimination, where those who have power often use it to oppress others rather than to build inclusion, justice, and peace.
3. Individuals, peoples, and countries also face catastrophes arising directly from an irresponsible and broken relationship with creation that has led to ecological injustice and climate crisis. As the climate emergency accelerates, so does the suffering experienced by impoverished and marginalized people.
4. Yet continuing our pilgrimage together as an assembly of the World Council of Churches, our mood has been one of anticipation and hope, and even joy, because through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ's invitation remains open to everyone, in fact to the whole of creation.
5. "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity." This love, in answer to the cries of those who are suffering, compels us to come to him in solidarity and to respond and act for justice. We are summoned to be reconciled in God's love, and to witness to that love revealed in Christ (1 John 4:9-11).

6. Reconciliation is a movement toward God and toward each other. It implies a readiness to listen to God and to one another. It is a conversion of the heart, from selfishness and apathy to inclusion and service, acknowledging our interdependence with creation. We confess that, even as we desire with our whole hearts to serve God and our neighbour, we have found ourselves failing, disagreeing, and sometimes walking in opposite directions. We confess that we need the transformative power of Christ's love to move to a world truly reconciled and united.
7. Christians, and the structures that we have built, have been complicit in the abuse of others, and we must repent and join in this movement of reconciliation. In the face of war, inequality, and sins against creation today, Christ's love calls us all to repentance, reconciliation, and justice.

### **Our journey together**

8. Amid all our diversity, we have relearned in our assembly that there is a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity to be undertaken together. Meeting together in Germany, we learn the cost of war and the possibility of reconciliation; Hearing the word of God together, we recognize our common calling; Listening and talking together, we become closer neighbours; Lamenting together, we open ourselves to each other's pain and suffering; Working together, we consent to common action; Celebrating together, we delight in each other's joys and hopes; Praying together, we discover the richness of our traditions and the pain of our divisions.

### **"Go into the whole world"**

9. From the time of his ascension into heaven, and even in this present moment, Christ unceasingly gives this command to all who follow him.
10. As reconciliation brings us closer to God and each other, it opens the way toward a unity founded in God's love. As Christians we are called to dwell in Christ's love and to be one (John 17). Such unity, which is a gift from God, and which arises from reconciliation and is grounded in his love, enables us to address the world's urgent problems. We will find a strength to act from a unity founded in Christ's love, for it enables us to learn the things that make for peace, to transform division into reconciliation, and to work for the healing of our living planet. Christ's love will sustain all of us in the task of embracing everyone and overcoming exclusion.
11. We have tasted the experience of such love as we gathered from 352 member churches with our ecumenical partners, friends from other faith communities, and from all regions of the world to seek unity amid our diversity. Together we have listened to voices often marginalized in the world: women, youth, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples.
12. We long for a wider movement, the reconciliation and unity of all humanity, and indeed of the entire cosmos. This would be a unity in which God establishes justice, an equal place for all, through which creation may be renewed and strengthened. We rely on Christ's love as we act and advocate for climate justice. We join our voices with the Amsterdam assembly (1948) that "war is contrary to the will of God," and the Nairobi assembly (1975) that "racism is a sin against God." We lament that we have to repeat these statements.
13. In our assembly, we have used many words, but from these we have fashioned a new resolve. Now we ask God's assistance to transform our commitments into action. We commit ourselves to working with all people of good will. As we reflect on the fruits of our

work in Karlsruhe, we invite all to become pilgrims together. For in Christ, all things will be made new. His love which is open to all, including the last, the least, and the lost, and is offered to all, can move and empower us in a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity.