

ECUMENICAL TRENDS

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A Ministry of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement

Editors' Note

This first issue of Volume 52 of *Ecumenical Trends* is a special issue pertaining in its entirety to the 11th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held August 31 – September 8, 2022, in Karlsruhe, Germany. Previewed here are two particularly significant documents of the recent assembly – its Message to the churches and to all people of goodwill, and the Report of the WCC's outgoing Moderator, Dr. Agnes Abuom of the Anglican Church of Kenya. These, along with an abundance of additional documents and statements deriving from the assembly, can be accessed on the WCC's website (<https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/organizational-structure/assembly>) and will appear, in their final form, in *The Ecumenical Review* and in the WCC's official report.

In addition to these documents, this issue of *Ecumenical Trends* contains original reporting and analysis by the Editors, who were both in attendance at Karlsruhe 2022 as members of the press corps. Fr. James Loughran, SA, offers an Atonement Franciscan perspective on the proceedings of the assembly, and Dr. Aaron Hollander weaves together the voices of eleven ecumenical leaders whom he interviewed while on site in Karlsruhe – plus an additional, exclusive interview with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Justin Welby, which is published here in its entirety.

We are also pleased to announce that, as of this issue of *Ecumenical Trends*, Aaron Hollander has been appointed Editor of *Ecumenical Trends*, with James Loughran, SA, taking over the role of Associate Editor. Additionally, we have appointed a dedicated Book Review Editor, Dr. Jakob Rinderknecht, who will be responsible for expanding and systematizing the book review offerings of the journal, strengthening this feature as a resource for the ecumenical and scholarly communities.

Message of the 11th Assembly: A Call to Act Together

By the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches

*The love of Christ urges us on.
(2 Corinthians 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 (see Matthew 11:28).

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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 neighbor, 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.

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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 neighbors;

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,

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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. 

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Report of the Moderator: Witnessing Together to Christ's Compassionate Love

By Agnes Abuom

A Living Image of One Humanity

Dear sisters and brothers, dear friends, what a great joy to see you all here in Karlsruhe in Germany:

- Delegates and leaders of our member churches;
- Representatives of churches, ecumenical partners;
- Leaders of other faith communities working together with the World Council of Churches (WCC) for the unity of humanity;
- Assembly participants and guests – the household of God's people, young and old, from all continents of the earth.

You are a living image of all humankind in all its diversity. You bring with you stories of people struggling for justice and peace and of communities working for reconciliation and unity. I am looking forward to listening to these stories of transformation and hope. I am eager to hear how Christ's compassionate love has motivated you and encouraged you. And together with you I will every day celebrate the signs that Christ's love really moves the world to reconciliation and unity.

We know, however, that cheap reconciliation and superficial unity are not enough. We need to confront ourselves with the world as it is, broken and marked by human sin. You bring with you the pain and the trauma of people suffering from violence and war. You carry the burden of communities divided by hate speech, racism, and ethnic tensions. Your villages and cities, forests like the Amazon rainforest, fields and rivers are deeply affected by the climate emergency and economic exploitation. There is hardly a family that has not been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Living together in this world, we are the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace; a pilgrimage whose inclusivity has been secured by the World Council of Churches.

We have come to Karlsruhe as pilgrims. The assembly is the place where we can share our hopes and anxieties, accompany and support each other, set new directions for our journey, and witness together to the love of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Why Are We Gathered Here?

Why are we gathered here in Karlsruhe on this station of our pilgrimage? Let me offer you four reasons:

First: We are gathered here because we are disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. As disciples of Jesus the Christ, who

announced good news to the poor, we firmly believe that his compassion for those who are on the margins must be lived out and proclaimed in a world increasingly marked by individualism and indifference towards those who are vulnerable, be they God's creation or our neighbors. It is the situation of those who are poor and marginalized that shows the quality of relationships in any single community or even entire societies. Their suffering exposes the lack of mutual care and love for the neighbor, and points to the urgent need for justice, peace, reconciliation, and unity. In this sense, in our times, the discipleship of Jesus Christ is counter-cultural.

Second: We are here because we belong to different communions of the disciples of Christ, which are not all in full communion with each other. If we are not in full communion as churches, we do not bear a clear witness to the biblical promise of God's reign: the end of all pain, the advent of peace, and the reconciliation and unity of all things in the one who overcame the powers of destruction and death. We must repent and manifest everywhere in the world, in the power of the Spirit, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church that we confess in the Creed. The Unity Statement of this assembly will be an important step forward in that direction.

Third: We are gathered here because we believe that human beings, regardless of their gender and the color of their skin, are created in the image of God and have equal dignity. We are here because we believe that the living Christ whom we follow is not only the head of the church but also the head of the new creation. Because we believe so, we are

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Dr. Agnes Abuom was elected unanimously by the WCC's 10th Assembly, on 8 November 2013, to serve as Moderator of the WCC Central Committee. She is the first woman and the first African in the position in the history of the World Council of Churches. Abuom has served on the WCC Executive Committee, representing the Anglican Church of Kenya. She is also a development consultant serving both Kenyan and international organizations coordinating social action programs for religious and civil society across Africa. Abuom was the Africa President for the WCC from 1999 to 2006. She has been associated with the All Africa Conference of Churches, with the National Council of Churches of Kenya, and with WCC member churches in Africa, as well as with Religions for Peace. Abuom's areas of work include economic justice, peace, and reconciliation.

As disciples of Jesus the Christ, who announced good news to the poor, we firmly believe that his compassion for those who are on the margins must be lived out and proclaimed in a world increasingly marked by individualism and indifference towards those who are vulnerable...

called to work hand-in-hand with people of other faiths or of no religious faith who are equally committed to a politics of radical compassion for the end of every single war or conflict, for greater economic justice, for the healing of creation, and for the well-being of future generations.

And fourth, we are gathered to conduct the business of the World Council of Churches: namely, to meditate, to reflect, and to evaluate our mandate and work of the period since the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan. Through prayer, Bible study, analysis of current issues, reflections, and discussions, the assembly will provide guidance on the future work, witness, and strategic positioning of the World Council of Churches.

Do you agree with me? Then let us keep these four reasons always in mind during the coming days as the shared basis of our deliberations. Let us be clear: This, the WCC's 11th Assembly, is more than the highest decision-making body of the WCC and the most representative gathering of Christians in the world. At its best, the assembly is a spiritual celebration of the power of God's love to renew our minds and hearts so that we may become a countercultural force driven by solidarity with the most vulnerable people and God's creation.

In other words, the assembly as a global gathering is a moment, a space, to celebrate, pray, meditate, reflect, and work to ensure that the soul, heart, and spirit of the fellowship and of humanity is kept alive, ignited, and renewed and not lost in the midst of the political or socio-economic injustices of the season. Spiritual celebration and celebration of life, sharing our joys and pains at this assembly, is of utmost importance as we emerge from a period of imposed isolation because of the COVID-19 pandemic for nearly three years. Even more tragic is the demise of our loved ones

whose memory we cherish. You agree with me that it is by God's grace that we are here alive to continue the pilgrimage! Our task is to continue the pilgrimage, in God's grace.

So many young people are anxiously struggling for life in justice and peace, and for the future of our planet. They go onto the streets here in Germany and in many other parts of world to voice their fears about the limited time left to save the planet, among other things. I beg you to listen carefully to the youth among us, so that we do not disappoint and fail them but are rather motivated and encouraged by their energy and commitment. They are the generation that is experiencing the first catastrophes of the climate crisis and the last generation that can take action to stop global warming.

We are blessed that we could have the Ecumenical Youth Gathering with around 400 young people, which included a youth pre-assembly right before the assembly. This was really a great achievement that will show its fruits during and after the assembly with a strengthened ecumenical youth network. There are about 200 students of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) among us, and 150 stewards and 50 young communicators are supporting us. Youth are active participants and we could not run this assembly without these motivated and highly dedicated young people. Thank you all!

At its best, the assembly is a spiritual celebration of the power of God's love to renew our minds and hearts so that we may become a countercultural force driven by solidarity with the most vulnerable people and God's creation.

Pilgrims on the Path of Peace

In this spirit, I turn now to the accountability report of the Central Committee, *Pilgrims on the Path of Peace: The Journey of the WCC from Busan to Karlsruhe*. You have all received it. Please read it carefully. I hope that this document conveys something of the excitement and energy of these years, of the churches learning more about regional contexts and local concerns through Pilgrim Team Visits (PTVs), of the strong partnerships forged to collaborate

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for climate justice, of reflecting on the promising ecumenical convergence captured in the Faith and Order text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

Among other concerns, the report highlights also: the engagements of the churches in the Colombian peace process and the racial reckoning in the United States; the closer ties with the Roman Catholic Church as well as with the World Evangelical Alliance; the challenging vision of a transforming discipleship; and the innovative ways in which the WCC and its fellowship have stayed together in mission and ministry through the COVID-19 pandemic.

This document is a precious resource for our deliberations. I will not summarize it now. I will rather share with you what I have experienced and learned on the pilgrimage from Busan to Karlsruhe. I will speak about the gifts that were shared, the wounds I saw, and the spiritual strength and power for transformative action I have witnessed.

A Timely Theme

Let me begin with our assembly theme that guides and inspires our reflections: “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.” Questions were raised at the beginning of our common journey to Karlsruhe if “love” is not a word that is used so much, so widely, and in so many different senses that it ends up saying little because it says too much. However, we soon realized that it does make sense to speak of love and more precisely of “Christ’s love” in today’s world. Why? Basically, for two reasons:

First, because an assembly theme is always about Christian mission, witness, and unity in prophetic dialogue with the spirit of a certain time. The first WCC assembly I was privileged to participate in was the 1975 assembly in Nairobi in my country Kenya. Its theme “Jesus Christ frees and unites” spoke to the struggles for liberation and an end to colonialism in the continent of Africa and in other regions of the global South. When today hate speech is nor-

malized through social media networks; when xenophobia and racism are nurtured by national populisms and politics of fear; when the poor face the consequences of the climate catastrophe and exploitation driven by the lifestyles of a few who are rich, does it make sense to call all Christians and churches to re-envision prophetically their apostolate, their mission, witness, and unity in relation to Christ’s compassionate love? If you need an answer, then please read each morning the Bible study for the day in the book *When He Saw the Crowds*.

Second, because meditating on Christ’s love will bring “radicality” to the assembly’s reflections in prophetic dialogue with the spirit of our time. Stories of Christ’s compassion and love for those at the margins of society inspire morning prayers, thematic plenaries, and home group discussions. Jesus’ acts of compassion led to his passion on the cross. The disciples’ memory of Jesus’ compassion also led Saint Paul to write to Christians in Corinth that Christ’s love urged them to engage in the ministry of reconciliation, that Christ’s love moved them and the world to reconciliation and unity (2 Corinthians 5:14-19).

This strong commitment to unity and our readiness to search for a common mind in the power of the Holy Spirit marks our deliberations according to consensus procedures. We have seen how well the consensus mode of decision-making buttressed by our spiritual life works for the WCC, even under difficult conditions on our way from Busan to Karlsruhe – not least in our last Central Committee meeting where with Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay we were able to elect a new General Secretary, and to agree on statements even concerning such difficult issues as the situation in Israel and Palestine and the war in Ukraine.

I trust that the assembly theme, together with the consensus procedures and our shared commitment to go forward together in unity, will also help us to address in constructive ways tensions and difficulties that divide humankind today.

The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace – A Timely Initiative

When the WCC’s 10th Assembly convened in 2013 in Busan, the churches called each other and all people of good will to embark on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and to engage in transformative action. We are bringing the harvest of this more than eight-year long journey to Karlsruhe to discuss the next steps we need to take in our common witness of Christ’s love.

The invitation of the Busan Assembly to join a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace offered a new metaphor under which Christian churches everywhere could see their work for justice and peace – new or existing – as part of a larger quest, uniting churches everywhere in praying, walk-

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Questions were raised at the beginning of our common journey to Karlsruhe if “love” is not a word that is used so much, so widely, and in so many different senses that it ends up saying little because it says too much.

The invitation of the Busan Assembly to join a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace offered a new metaphor under which Christian churches everywhere could see their work for justice and peace – new or existing – as part of a larger quest, uniting churches everywhere in praying, walking, and working toward God’s coming reign of justice and peace.

ing, and working toward God’s coming reign of justice and peace. The pilgrimage presented not a new program or initiative as such but offered instead a dynamic framework for the churches’ life and work, understood as a sacred journey of openness, encounter, learning, and collaboration toward the God of life and for a world of peace and justice.

There are three experiences I would like to highlight here:

First, the Pilgrimage has shown to us that remaining doctrinal and ethical disagreements, important as they are, should not stand in the way of deepening our collaboration and fellowship given in Christ. We owe to present and future generations and all creation that we address the crises of life we are facing by walking together on the way of justice and peace, witnessing to Christ’s compassionate love.

Second, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace offered a new framework to integrate local, national, regional, and global levels of the ecumenical movement with a shared focus on the poorest and most marginalized people in so many places of the world. It has been a very moving experience during our Pilgrim Team Visits to listen to women standing up against violence and male misuse of power in far too many countries of this world. They showed amazing strength sharing with us stories of their courageous struggle for justice and peace, for instance in Colombia and South Sudan. Turning to the most vulnerable people in our communities, I was struck by their resilience, mutual solidarity, and spiritual strength in celebrating life against all odds. Deeply rooted in their faith in God as the giver of life, in Christ as brother and companion on the way, and in the

power of the Holy Spirit who sustains them day by day, they gave me far more than I could have ever expected. They gave me hope that change is possible and courage to trust Christ’s unfailing love in the midst of violence, destruction, and death.

And third, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace was conducive to embracing and even accelerating the change that was required by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic was pushing the WCC to implement new ways of working together, embracing and utilizing new methodologies and technologies. Staff adjusted rather quickly and kept communication and program delivery at a high level through the intensive use of electronic media. It was just amazing what we could achieve, for instance, through hybrid Pilgrim Team Visits to Indigenous Peoples and to communities of people of African descent in North America that helped us to understand their struggles against racism, colonial patterns of oppression, and the ongoing misuse of bodies and minds.

I am convinced that the ecumenical movement as a whole will benefit from the approach of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. I saw how the spirituality of communities was unleashed and energized when the global community of pilgrims encountered their sisters and brothers in the various different local contexts and vice versa. In all places it was not at all difficult to explore the given context using the three dimensions of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: celebrating the gifts, visiting the wounds, and transforming the injustices.

We experienced this

- In Israel and Palestine, mourning together in front of the separation wall and supporting farmers and communities in their quest for water justice;
- In Nigeria and other places in Africa, listening to women and leaders engaging in interfaith dialogue and facing communal violence;
- In Colombia, visiting communities that carry the scars of decades of civil war and are struggling for peace and access to land;
- In India, encountering Dalits in their struggle for equal rights and human dignity;
- Among Koreans yearning for peace and reconciliation in their divided country, among migrants and refugees in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand, and among the struggles of Indigenous People in West Papua or the Philippines;
- In Fiji, meeting communities that were forced to resettle because of rising sea levels or were affected by environmentally destructive mining practices;

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- Encountering Indigenous Peoples reclaiming their lands and identities in North America and joining hands in the struggle for reparations for the consequences of colonialism and slavery with their sisters and brothers of African descent;
- And finally, this year, listening to the Sami people in northern Europe, encountering migrants and refugees in Italy, and visiting Armenia and Ukraine.

Affirming Life and Human Dignity

We began the journey of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace concentrating on four systemic issues affecting people all over the world. These were:

- The climate crisis and care for creation,
- Economic injustice and the struggle for an economy of life,
- Violence and wars and the work for just peace through peacebuilding and reconciliation,
- Racism, ethnic pride, and oppression of women and the affirmation of human dignity.

We used these four lenses to understand and interpret the struggles of people today only to learn that they are highly interconnected and affect peoples' lives as a whole. When people started speaking about their wounds and what needs to be done to change the situation, their stories centered on five recurrent themes:

- Truth and trauma,
- Land and displacement,
- Gender justice,
- Racism, and
- Health and healing.

They need to be addressed by the WCC as transversals, cross-cutting issues that open up the search for alternatives to the systemic realities of oppression, exploitation, and destruction of the basis of life.

Transformative discipleship then requires the affirmation of life and human dignity. Let us say this with confidence and hope and let us take the necessary decisions moving us in this direction so that the ecumenical movement and the WCC will continue to flourish in the future. Let us do this with courage and energy.

We are singing in our prayers the wonderful song of Per Harling: "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity. In Christ's love, there is no fear. The Spirit empowers us to be bold and free!"

No fear, dear friends, esteemed sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ! In Christ's love, we are free! We can and we must be bold and prophetic, standing up for justice and

peace. To proclaim Christ's love and to struggle for human dignity and the life of creation is our call and our mission in this world.

Let Christ's love move us! In Christ's love lies the key to our unity! Let us continue walking, praying, and working together as pilgrims on the way of justice and peace with the purpose of healing, reconciliation, and unity for all. These words have deep meaning and very practical consequences in the context of our recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate catastrophe, and violence and war in Ukraine, Ethiopia, and far too many other places. Our hearts must be wide. Our support and solidarity must be with all people who suffer. This is costly discipleship. When he saw the crowds, Christ had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless.

"Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity. In Christ's love there is no fear. The Spirit empowers us to be bold and free!" May this song inspire us in the coming days and the days to come when we return home and share our stories about the assembly.

Our hearts must be wide. Our support and solidarity must be with all people who suffer. This is costly discipleship. When he saw the crowds, Christ had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless.

Gratitude for the Achievements of the Central Committee and for Companions on the Pilgrimage

Let me conclude now with personal remarks as the moderator of the outgoing Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. I take this opportunity on your behalf to wholeheartedly thank all those churches and communities in Germany who have invited us to Karlsruhe and are hosting us in very generous ways. In addition, may I, on your behalf, express our deep gratitude to the German government for their gracious facilitation of this assembly. This gesture makes it possible to secure full participation by member churches.

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The work of the WCC and, for that matter, the assembly is made possible by the invaluable and incredible contributions of many committed actors. To begin with, I sincerely wish to thank our member churches and, by extension, the members of the Central Committee for their resilience during the tragic period of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes institutional compliance with their fiduciary role as well as their fervent prayers for the WCC and the ecumenical movement at large.

I am also grateful to our former General Secretary, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, currently serving as the presiding bishop of the Church of Norway. As General Secretary, he faithfully delivered the mandate given to him, not least the 10th Assembly call to women and men of good will and faith to move together on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

Our present Acting General Secretary, the Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Sauca, has walked and continues to walk in these footsteps while adapting to the new challenges.

My appreciation also goes to the members of the Leadership of the Central Committee and the Executive Committee for the careful navigation of their governance roles. Let me ask you to always remember with gratitude the late Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima who was essential in the assembly preparations throughout. He never tired of calling us to witness to the love of Christ and the unity already given us in Christ.

As the Central Committee, we held many meetings made possible by the team spirit and work, and the improved art of listening to each other. Christian world communions, regional ecumenical organizations, ecumenical partners, and specialized ministries continued to provide essential accompaniment to the WCC and member churches in ways that affirm the compassionate love of Christ.


It has been a great honor and privilege to work with the Staff Leadership Group (SLG) and the entire staff team of the WCC, some of whom have blossomed during this period. I thank the SLG for its skilled leadership of the council and its careful preparation of governing body meetings.

Jesus' compassion for stigmatized minorities, for those for whom little compassion is visible today, will challenge us and our churches to metanoia, to conversion, to the renewal of our minds and hearts so that we may become in tomorrow's world a countercultural force driven by solidarity with the most vulnerable...

Conclusion

As the assembly gathers to reflect on the churches' mission, witness and unity in prophetic dialogue with the spirit of our time, Jesus' compassion for stigmatized minorities, for those for whom little compassion is visible today, will challenge us and our churches to *metanoia*, to conversion, to the renewal of our minds and hearts so that we may become in tomorrow's world a countercultural force driven by solidarity with the most vulnerable towards the survival of God's creation, for which so many young people are anxiously struggling today in Germany and in many parts of the world.

In this way, churches will be challenged to seek to overcome their divisions through an "ecumenism of the heart": that is, an ecumenism in which we look at other churches first of all with the eyes of communion in the love of the compassionate Jesus, and with the eyes of common commitment to God's kingdom; and only within the solid foundation of that unity in Christ do we look at what separates them in matters of faith, ordained ministry, or ethics.

Please receive this day and the coming days in a spirit of prayer and personal commitment to witness to Christ's compassionate love. Thank you. 

Editorial

Karlsruhe 2022: An Atonement Franciscan Perspective

By James Loughran, SA

A Heartfelt Ecumenism: Atonement Franciscans and the World Council of Churches

Since its foundation in the Episcopal Church in 1898, and through its reception into full communion with the Catholic Church in 1909, the Society of the Atonement has prayed and worked for the full visible unity of Christ's Church as a part of its Christian and Franciscan mission to bring hope, healing, and harmony to our world. In imitation of its founders, Fr. Paul Wattson, SA, and Mother Lurana White, SA, the friars and sisters have been steadfast in their support of the ecumenical movement. Thus, the Society's two institutes – Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute (in New York City), with its journal *Ecumenical Trends* and its ongoing lectures, workshops, and colloquia; and the Centro Pro Unione (in Rome), with its vast library resources, electronic researching capabilities, and scholarly programming – contribute what they may so that “all may be one.”

In this vein, since Vatican II opened the door to Catholic participation in the modern ecumenical movement, friars and sisters have attended the various Assemblies of the World Council of Churches. It was my delight, as well as that of our Associate Director, Dr. Aaron Hollander, to attend the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, Germany, from August 31 – September 8, 2022, as members of the press representing *Ecumenical Trends*.

The scripturally grounded theme of the 11th Assembly was “Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity.” In 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, we read: “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised for them.”

In the *Resource Book* for the General Assembly, page 45, the preparation committee notes: “The theme set for the 2022 Assembly in Karlsruhe reminds us that the church, as the body of Christ, is moved by Christ himself... As we are moved by what is revealed and given through Christ's love, so we are given the gift of loving Christ and, through him, all that God has made.” And later, on page 54, the thought continues: “The churches need now, together, in a renewed ecumenical movement for the sake of the world, to find a more public voice to speak a truer hope than the empty optimism of any faded political rhetoric...”

These insights resound with distinct clarity within the Franciscan/Atonement spirit. The paschal mystery, which is at the heart of the Atonement, brings about a unity with the Godhead. Yet unity does not end there. It is not a stagnant relationship of once-and-for-all reconciliation with God. It is, rather, a dynamic and vivacious reconciliation that brings healing unity to humanity and to all of creation, mediated by the actions of all who accept the gospel way of life.

This lively reconciliation bears witness to hope, healing, and harmony in a world terribly divided by political power and economic exploitation. Human dignity, so dear to Francis of Assisi, is raised up on high in this gift of honest recovery from the metastasizing sins of the world, such as racism, gender bias, war, and unchecked pestilence. The Franciscan dedication to care for the earth, and to the pursuit of *justice* for the earth, is also guided by a proper application of lively reconciliation.

Spiritual ecumenism, the “soul” of the ecumenical movement, was deeply imbedded into the events of the weeklong Assembly in Karlsruhe. Liturgical opportunities, such as morning and evening prayers, were diverse and full of the Spirit of God. Prayer times before and after plenaries followed different genres relating to the themes of the days – from climate justice to peace building and reconciliation, from human dignity to Christian unity itself. Prayer was the core of the whole Assembly.

In the *Resource Book*, page 86, the pre-Assembly survey revealed interesting, if not surprising, results. On key issues and concerns for future work, Christian unity ranked first (61%), followed by climate justice (54%), human dignity and rights (53%), and peacebuilding and reconciliation (47%). These were followed to important but lesser degrees

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The Rev. James Loughran, SA, is Vicar General of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, Director of Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute, and Associate Editor of Ecumenical Trends. He has long been involved in ecumenical and interreligious affairs in the New York area, and he is a veteran member of the USCCB dialogue with the National Council of Synagogues. He has lectured in seminaries, churches, and other houses of worship, and he serves on the faculty of the Summer Course in Ecumenism at the Centro Pro Unione in Rome.

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by gender justice, mission and evangelism, economic justice, interreligious cooperation, youth engagement, racial justice, theological education, spirituality, health and healing, land and displacement, well-being of children, digital change, and truth and trauma.

Priorities do change, however. In planning for the Assembly, no one was prepared for the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and no one could have predicted how the situation would develop by the time of the Assembly. There was also justifiable concern about a new wave of COVID, which thankfully did not take place at the Assembly. Along with the addition of the invasion as a formidable topic at the Assembly, the other issues above were robustly discussed.

Together on the Way: Reflections on Eight Days in Karlsruhe

After the first day's opening ceremonies, shared prayers, and local receptions, Day 2 of the Assembly was dedicated to Care for Creation: "The Purpose of God's Love in Christ for the Whole Creation" The first thematic plenary was opened by the Rev. Dr. Ioan Sauca, Acting General Secretary of the WCC, who introduced recorded greetings by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. In his comments, Bartholomew called for the care of the earth, insisting that "we cannot ignore the divine presence in all things and all people." Additionally, he called on all believers to address the issues of climate change with self-criticism and humility, and indeed with a kind of *metanoia* or profound conversion. Regarding human suffering as a result of climate change, the Patriarch stated that climate change was in the long term far more deadly than COVID

and requires immediate action. He added that the "time for the Lord is right now" and made reference also to the suffering of the people in the Ukraine.

Fr. Sauca then introduced Cardinal Kurt Koch of the Holy See's Dicastery on Christian Unity. In his opening remarks, Cardinal Koch spoke of the Catholic Church's partnership with the WCC, especially in the Faith and Order Commission and in the preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. He also mentioned that Catholic observers have been coming to the WCC Assemblies since New Delhi in 1961. Then, he read the greetings of Pope Francis to the Assembly in Spanish. The Pope reiterated what Patriarch Bartholomew had said earlier, stating that climate change can only be addressed through a conversion of heart, not merely through technological or political solutions, and that therefore the Church must make its unity more visible to make its commitment to the flourishing of the world more credible.

The first keynote following these messages was delivered by Metropolitan Immanuel of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In his address, he noted that Christ has reconciled all things in the blood of the cross and that we need to live in expectation of this reconciliation. He challenged human insularity: we need dialogue in order to heal the wounds of the past and to live into the grace of the Logos, where two or three can agree on what to ask the Lord. He called for urgent protection of the environment, as the earth itself "is an icon of God's love." Human competition for natural resources is not only contributing to ecological degradation but also represents a grave threat to justice and peace. There should be "no exploitation of nature just as [there should be] no exploitation of faith. In protecting humanity we must protect creation."

From the Cantic of the Sun, that original "*laudato si*" of St. Francis of Assisi, to the Encyclical on the Environment by His All Holiness Bartholomew I, to the "new" *Laudato Si* of Pope Francis, the Church has been bold in challenging the world to bring justice for the earth. In the common home that we all share, we have been made stewards of creation. To abuse the earth is not only to threaten human life – which persists in a delicate balancing act with the life of all living things, dependent on their flourishing – but it is also to abandon our calling and betray our creation in the image of God. Protecting the earth from abuse is then a fundamental act of lively reconciliation.

The theme for Day 3 was Europe, but it was mainly focused on the war in Ukraine. The presence of that war overshadowed everything else. The Scriptural reflection for the day was the parable of the Good Samaritan: "How Christ's love moves us to love."

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Archbishop Yevstratiy of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which is seeking recognition of its autocephaly in the Orthodox world (and has applied for membership in the WCC), spoke of Russian atrocities in the current war within Ukraine. He was joined by a representative of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (established by and still linked with the Moscow Patriarchate), who echoed the assessment of these atrocities. Thus, grief over and resistance to the Russian war effort proved to be a moment of ecumenical solidarity between two Ukrainian churches whose relationship otherwise remains fraught.

The Russian Orthodox Church had no speaking role in the plenary. This was a mutual choice in the programming. At the press conference later in the day, Archbishop Yevstratiy addressed the absence of the Russian Orthodox at the table, saying: “They must hear words of truth from the Assembly. We have no contacts with them. If they said they would be open, that would be one thing. But if they only wish to use propaganda and justify war crimes, no. But we would speak. I have no idea if they wish to speak with us. It’s hard to dialogue with someone who doesn’t even think you exist.”

War is a disaster in so many ways. It brings chaos and death, separation and hate. It is the opposite of reconciliation. Turning the other cheek has no meaning, especially in a war of aggression that can find no justification. It is a total breakdown in the fabric of human life. Recently, the Catholic Church has been reassessing the term “just war,” which has been a concept integral to its ethical teaching for many centuries. How can a church body justify the calamity and tragedy of war, even with the cold calculus of lives saved through lives destroyed? Such justification is a scandal to the gospel and a crude collapse of its suprarational promise of transformative love.

The thematic plenary on Day 6 (following two days of pilgrimage programs, during which participants visited local communities in small groups) concerned the dignity of human life and the affirmation of the wholeness of life. The Scriptural theme was that of the healing of the man who was blind from birth. The plenary began with a dramatic pantomime, followed by a lengthy session on the multifaceted problems facing the dignity of human life today, all conducted in the style of a Maori “Talinoor” conversation. Many voices were represented, weaving a tapestry of perspectives around three core questions: Where are we now? Where do we want to go? How do we get there?

The first question, “Where are we now?” was answered with various laments: We are in a world crisis of values. There is much greed and self-centeredness. This is all exacerbated by the climate crisis, along with the colonial extraction of resources and the “control” of narratives. The second question, “Where do we want to go?” prompted articulations of an intersectionality of love where respect for the dignity of all could be achieved, restoring the ethical and political priority of people over profit. We seek solidarity and justice, with a new social contract inclusive of faith. We need to repent, obey God, and come up with inclusive strategies. And in response to the final question, “How do we get there?” delegates insisted that we stop talking and start acting, and that we lean in all things – and lean together, setting aside our security in our own preferences of thought and life – on the compassion of Christ. Yet, in spite of this appeal to Christ’s own compassion, one critique of the session is that relatively little was said about relying on supernatural grace to carry out the movement we seek. Activism without faith is unsustainable and dry.

At a press conference later in the day, one of the plenary panelists (Ms. Ruth Mathen, from the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church of India), delivered one of the most profound and troubling statements of the Assembly. She stated in no uncertain terms that young people around the world are in a state of despair. Many of them try to live sustainable lifestyles, but are unable to do so because they are trapped in corrosive systems in which institutions absorb any change on an individual level. But she offered a message of hope as well, in her appeal to faith communities: namely, that such communities amplify these voices and energize young people to work for institutional transformation. How do we hold corporations accountable? How do we hold national leaders accountable? How do we counter religious nationalism with ecumenical and interreligious hospitality? We must raise our prophetic voices even if we are minorities, and even if individual action seems hopeless. We have the opportunity and responsibility to live in accordance with our values.

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The reflections of the day contained many powerful call-to-action statements, but they never seemed to raise the idea that faith in God requires some level of trust in God's intervention. From a Franciscan point of view, the power of prayer was not raised to the degree it should have been, with the result that the corrupt power of profit-obsessed institutions came across as more total, more insurmountable, than people of faith should hold it to be.

The theme for Day 7 was "Affirming Justice and Human Dignity," and its conversations were led by those concerned with racial, gender, and disability issues in the churches. The thematic plenary began with a beautiful and moving dance between a woman and a man in a wheelchair, followed by a pantomime on the dialogue between Jesus and the Canaanite woman. Speakers in the plenary noted that the church is not only complacent with regard to racial and gender-based injustices, but complicit as well – through its silence as much as through its history of unworthy action. Too often, the church remains like the crowd in the story of the Canaanite woman, treating modern women with the same mistrust and dehumanizing disregard. We have been too wedded to systems of patriarchal and colonial power, which have benefitted our pocketbooks and geopolitical interests at the expense of our souls.

Other commentary on this day asked the Assembly's participants to adapt our churches and our hearts to the perception and lived experience of those on the margins. Otherwise we will never admit to ourselves how people in our midst suffer rejection and violence. Where has the church failed? How is reconciliation possible? *Metanoia* is needed – not only one-time repentance of a wrong done, but real change of heart that results in a change of direction, and in making real amends for those our institutions have harmed.

This day's press conference reaffirmed and extended the invitation to conversion through encounter with margin-

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alized voices. Dr. Henriette Hutabarat-Lebang (of the Toraja Church of Indonesia and WCC President from Asia) spoke of the wisdom of the spirituality of local people. The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson (United Church of Christ) spoke of the challenges facing women even in highly developed societies, where even today they earn on average 37% less than men. The WCC too, these delegates insisted, needs to examine its own contribution to the problem of inequitable representation and authority – not least by expecting the inclusion of more women in the delegations from local churches, and perhaps especially those which do not ordain women. Without reassessing who is at the table, the fellowship as a whole will not be able to change. So too, as Rev. Dr. Gordon Cowans (United Church of Jamaica) observed, inclusivity for people with disabilities is not only a matter of compassion – it is of a piece with our commitment to God's justice reigning on Earth. Disabled members of our churches are not looking for charity or sympathy: they have much to offer and are owed not only apologies but vigorous inclusion in the life and leadership of our communities.

One of the touchstone moments in the total conversion of St. Francis of Assisi was his embrace of the leper. Lepers had disgusted him in his youth. He had viewed them as completely separate from him; he may have pitied them, but they were not part of his life. Moved by Christ's love to embrace the leper in his path, however, he not only conquered his fears and prejudice but also entered into brotherly fellowship with the leper, who shared with him the inviolable image of God. Conversion of heart was for Francis, and for us, the basic starting place for the full reconciliation that follows: the atonement ("at-one-ment") that finds its root in the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus and its fulfillment in his glorious resurrection, which brings about the Reign of God open to all peoples. But each participant in that Reign is first called to conversion of heart, without which we remained closed in upon ourselves and incapable of being moved by Christ's love.

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The theme of Day 8 was about the very identity of the WCC: What calls us to Christian unity? The scriptural theme was from Matthew 19:20, where James' and John's mother asks Jesus about who will sit on his right and left. Jesus' answer is a call to servanthood. We are called not to be served, but to serve. In that spirit, the thematic plenary began with the famous musical meditation of the Taizé community, "Ubi Caritas."

This day was a precious opportunity to clarify the source and meaning of unity, which are so regularly dissolved by conflicting language and incompatible understandings of what the ecumenical movement is for. It was repeatedly noted that spiritual experience and appreciation, though fundamental to ecumenical unity, are not sufficient. There are 352 churches in the WCC: do they all understand the meaning and purpose of the ecumenical movement differently? And is there not a need for a common understanding of the Church in order to share in transformative discipleship? Or is our obsession with unambiguous language and unanimity of minds a reflection of our all-too-human approach to institutional togetherness, which will inevitably fail to contain the love of which we are stewards?

The plenary session opened with an address by His Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. He made reference to the Lambeth Conference this past summer, which had many of the same themes as the WCC Assembly, relating the life of the church to the crises in the world. Archbishop Justin said there were huge differences among the participants on matters of human sexuality, but that "we went forward anyway... In this time of world crisis we move forward. We love one another fervently from the heart." We need grace urgently, he said, in order to disagree without hatred and to commit to one another despite our disagreement: "Christians are called to be a people, not separate peoples, [and] new life will come with us taking risks in ecumenism... We live among the ecumenism of suffering, of service, theological understanding." He went on to say: "It's no longer affordable to be divided. We must love one another and give more common witness." He called for a visible unity that is nevertheless the organic unity of a diverse community, not a unity achieved through idolatries of lockstep identity.

Metropolitan Job of Pisidia, Permanent Representative

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of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the WCC, spoke next about reception of the Faith and Order text, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. He noted that, while there still are matters of faith and order to be resolved, it is more often the political and ethical questions that create divisions within and between our church communities. The document attempts to be a beacon of convergence, concerning the nature and mission of the church. Yet Metropolitan Job also challenged us on the core issue of unity, saying that, if indeed "our main goal is unity... we need to discover how much in common we have. Christians are challenged by ourselves. In Europe we see Christians killing Christians... Reconciliation is the key word for the future of the ecumenical movement."

Bishop Brian Farrell of the Holy See's Dicastery on Christian Unity said that the past decades of cooperation between the Holy See and the WCC have gone so well that we should call it a "partnership." Even since the 10th Assembly in Busan, the achievements of this partnership have been substantial. For example, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* "is a significant achievement," representing a shared ecclesiology without overlooking the tensions that still need to be addressed. Bishop Farrell sees the next great challenge as being the cultivation of a new and productive "hermeneutic of differences." He stated that "world mission and evangelism are deeply important, [helping] us to avoid unilateralism." Further, he reminded the Assembly participants that moral and ethical questions are of great interest to Catholics. He called for strengthening the kerygmatic and charismatic aspects of our faith: "Let us not work in isolation," he concluded.

A Pentecostal representative noted at this point that Pentecostals have had a hard time fitting in with the ecumenical movement. They are sustained, however, by the ecumenical focus on service to others. Since Busan, the WCC has sincerely reached out, and Pentecostals are building new and genuine relationships and trust with their ecumenical partners. The Global Christian Forum has also been helpful in building these relationships. She added, however, that if one is looking for real impact, one has to look at the local levels, "and we are not there yet."

Attending the press conference later in the day were the Archbishop Justin of Canterbury, Bishop Brian Farrell from the Holy See, Metropolitan Job of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and Dr. Sandra Beardsall of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. The first three reiterated and expanded on their important contributions to the morning plenary, while Dr. Beardsall made special note of plans to commemorate the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025. She looked to the future, noting that the Faith and Order Commission is committed to employing

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such anniversaries as 2025 not as an invitation to fetishize the past, but rather “as a foundation to explore” what is yet to come. “It will be a year of events... and we hope to engage with as many people as possible.”

In answer to a question at the press conference from *Ecumenical Trends*' Aaron Hollander about the urgency of reconciliation *within* as much as (or even more than) between the churches, Bishop Farrell acknowledged that there is substantial pain, anger, and mistrust within the Catholic Church, but reminded us that the kind of reconciliation needed will differ from context to context: “This is complicated for Catholics, as reconciliation is different in South America than in Africa... The wise answer is to go back to the simplicity of the Gospel. Unless we are genuinely Christian, nothing can solve the human questions.” However, being

“genuinely Christian” is clearly only the beginning for the hard road of reconciliation to follow.

Conclusion

The “four pillars” of the world ecumenical movement in the present day are: the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Global Christian Forum along with the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and the World Pentecostal Fellowship (WPF). These come together in the Conference of the Secretaries of Christian World Communions (CWCs).

The beauty and simplicity of inviting non-WCC guests to conversations at the Assembly only added to the dynamism of the meetings. The questions asked were profound, and the interplay between our many perspectives was illuminating. The data shared were truly revealing and the answers offered were numerous. But the binding element across the whole Assembly was a yearning for sustainable reconciliation and heartfelt unity – terms at the core of the Franciscan tradition and intertwined with the meaning of “atonement” or “at-one-ment.” The mission of lively reconciliation continues – with the Society of the Atonement living into that mission every day, re-energized by our participation, however modest, in Karlsruhe 2022. 

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Editorial

“For God’s Sake, Do Something Brave!” Voices of Karlsruhe 2022 on Renewal, Reconciliation, and the Realignment of the Heart – Part One

By Aaron Hollander

At the 11th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held between August 31st and September 8th, 2022, in Karlsruhe, Germany, more than 4000 representatives of 352 member churches (and many more non-delegate observers) gathered for a week of intellectual exchange, interpersonal growth, and spiritual renewal. Of course, the kinds of conversations that needed to be had were far from anodyne: the humanitarian crises in Ukraine, Ethiopia, and elsewhere dominated the minds of the Assembly, and in particular of the Orthodox Christian representatives, whose typically systematic minority reporting on any number of key ecumenical themes and challenges was muted in comparison with what had been heard in previous Assemblies. Nevertheless, an atmosphere of resilience, hope, and electric uncertainty was palpable: over and over, participants observed that we are entering a new phase of ecumenical endeavor – one in which, to paraphrase Václav Havel’s assessment of the late twentieth century, the old is passing away and the new has yet to emerge. Relationships between ecclesial communities are strengthening in substantial and long-hoped-for ways, even as agonizing fissures are deepening within those same communities, threatening their witness and their ethical grounding no less (and perhaps rather more) than the scandal of interdenominational division ever did.

Over the course of the Assembly, in my capacity as a member of the press corps, I sought opportunities to sit down with representatives of numerous church communities from numerous national contexts, posing them questions about the overriding theme of Karlsruhe 2022 (“Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity”), about how this theme and especially the core challenge of reconciliation of formerly (or currently) antagonistic communities are playing out in their home ecclesial contexts and about the challenge of ecumenical formation – the “realignment of the heart” toward one another and our shared ecumenical task that Susan Durber has identified as the core of the ecumenical paradigm now needed and attempted by the 11th Assembly.¹ Honored with the time, attention, and insight of these diverse Assembly participants, *Ecumenical Trends* is now able to compile a (inevitably partial, but illuminating) selection of voices whose resonances and dissonances offer an instructive encounter with the challenge, promise, and shifting orientation of the World Council of Churches as a

framework for the healing and building of interchurch relationships in our time.

The eleven Assembly participants I interviewed at length are:

- **Ms. Joy Eva Bohol**, WCC Program Executive for Youth Engagement, Philippines and Switzerland (United Methodist Church)
- **Dr. Sergii Bortnyk**, Professor, Kyiv Theological Academy, Ukraine (Ukrainian Orthodox Church)
- **Ms. Leanne Clelland**, Communications Manager, Iona Community, Scotland (Reformed)
- **Rev. Peter Cook**, Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches, United States (United Church of Christ)
- **Most Rev. Vasilios Karayiannis**, Metropolitan Bishop of Constantia-Ammochostos, Cyprus (Orthodox Church of Cyprus)
- **Mr. V. V. Kipshidze**, Media Relations Personnel, Russian Orthodox Church, Russia (Russian Orthodox Church)
- **Br. Alois Loeser**, Prior, Taizé Community, France (Roman Catholic)
- **Rev. Dr. Fulata Lusungu Moyo**, Founder, Thimlela-STREAM, Malawi (Presbyterian Church of Central Africa)
- **Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser**, Former General Secretary, World Council of Churches, Germany (Evangelical Church of Germany)

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- **Rev. Rostyslav Vorobii**, Priest, Transfiguration of Jesus Cathedral, Ukraine (Orthodox Church in Ukraine)
- **Rev. Dr. Angélique Walker-Smith**, Senior Associate for Pan-African, Orthodox and Ecumenical Faith Engagement at Bread for the World & WCC President from North America, United States (American Baptist Church)

Their comments are excerpted (in some places paraphrased for clarity and flow – I take responsibility for any misrepresentation of others’ ideas, though it has been my paramount commitment to avoid such misrepresentation), and they are organized thematically rather than as discrete and complete interviews, since in this way it is possible to highlight the resonances and patterns emerging across a wide array of perspectives at the Assembly. *The four Orthodox voices in this group, because our conversations almost entirely concerned the humanitarian and ecumenical crisis in Ukraine, will be published separately as Part Two of this coverage, in the next issue of Ecumenical Trends (March/April 2023).* But an additional interview, with Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, follows the present compilation and is presented in its entirety (“Habits of the Heart: Ecumenical Formation and the Way of Reconciliation”).

1) On Reconciliation

Aaron Hollander, for *Ecumenical Trends*: Here in Karlsruhe, the present Assembly of the WCC is being shaped and guided by a theme dealing with Christ’s love, with unity and reconciliation. These are large and fraught concepts, of course – it is by design that an Assembly theme be capacious enough to focus attention from many different interpretive angles. But there are, potentially, drawbacks to themes driven by such ur-concepts of the ecumenical movement. “Unity” has been debated to exhaustion over the last century (and far longer), often slipping into abstraction or platitude. “Reconciliation,” perhaps, requires more pragmatic thinking about how to reckon with and resolve the disintegration of specific relationships. This has its own pitfalls, to be sure, but it may be a more productive starting point.

What do these concepts open up for you? Are they overlapped, or still fruitful – and if the latter, in what ways? And what do you take to be a particularly pressing challenge or obstacle to reconciliation with those whom we have hated or feared – or whom we still do?

Joy Eva Bohol: If we look at the ecumenical movement over the course of its history, of course a lot of time has been spent playing with words, but it’s important also to see how prophetic we have been. The Assembly theme is clearly attempting to be prophetic – our hope is that it names something about how we will reconnect with each other in this time of pandemic and political disarray. No

Relationships between ecclesial communities are strengthening in substantial and long-hoped-for ways, even as agonizing fissures are deepening within those same communities...

matter where we look, regardless of which issue we take up, we see a stark divide between the rich and the poor; and many other varieties of injustice have been amplified during this pandemic time. And then there are the wars – not only in the European context, of course, but all around the world.

The question that matters, though, is less whether the theme addresses our moment and more how we actually *act* upon the theme. I remember one of the young people, when we were at the pre-Assembly, saying: “Will this be a waste of time again? Or are we going to be productive?” That is one of the fears of the youth in the ecumenical movement especially, and they are right to fear it: that we leave this space having again wasted our time. If we don’t want that to happen, then we have to be concrete with the actions that we want to accomplish. If Christ’s love *moves* us to reconciliation and unity, where and how specifically are we moving?

As the explanation of the theme makes clear, Christ’s love is not just any love. Because in our time, we talk about love very casually: “Oh, I love this band,” or “I love this brand.” But the love we are speaking of here is the love that describes the compassion of Christ. When Jesus was on the cross, he prayed that his Father would have compassion even on his murderers, and *this* is the kind of compassion that is acclaimed and sought by our Christian faith. And so, for example, when we see our sisters and brothers who are living at the front line of the climate crisis, what will that kind of compassion move us to do? I’m from the Philippines, and we have dozens of typhoons each year. Last year saw the strongest typhoon that had hit my city in the past ten years, and my family had to drive for five hours up north, and then wait for five days, queue for drinking water, and wait another five days to travel to another island, in order to seek refuge there and have access to drinking water and electricity. That’s just one example – but we need to be asking, as particular church communities and as a church universal, how can we have compassion on people who undergo such devastation?

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The Assembly theme is clearly attempting to be prophetic – our hope is that it names something about how we will reconnect with each other in this time of pandemic and political disarray.

We want to work toward reconciliation and unity, but these are not abstract goals, and they do not happen without changing what we are doing and changing who we are toward one another. Another thing that I've heard discussed in one of the panels here is that we cannot work towards reconciliation without repentance. We have to repent. And we have to repent not only of the wrongs we've done to one another, but also of our complacency toward one another's suffering – because not doing anything is also doing something, right? Not acting is choosing to live out of self-satisfaction rather than out of compassion.

Aaron Hollander: Repentance is that which turns us around, turns us aside from the direction we're going or not going, and sets us on another trajectory. And if we're in a situation of inertia, if we're moving steadily in one direction and we need to turn around to go in another direction, that repentance is especially hard. Compassion too, is *active* – it isn't just sympathy, in the sense of just feeling bad for people who are hurting, but it entails being moved to do something to change their situation. There is a sharp challenge here for any WCC Assembly or other ecumenical gathering that says all the right things but then sends its participants home to stay the course. If we are making statements full of prophetic witness, but then don't actually act on it, are we not falsifying that witness?

Joy Eva Bohol: Christ's love *moves* the world. We are an ecumenical *movement*. And we cannot move if we don't act. Ecumenism properly understood is a verb, not a noun – so our calling now is to be bold and to be uncomfortable as we act. And that is what being prophetic *is*, not just inspiring words. The WCC came to be in the first place because of the boldness and willing discomfort of its visionaries, and the WCC has often been known as a Christian entity that stands up for what is right or what is just, standing up for human rights, standing against war and ethnic hatred and ecological collapse. But now, if you actually ask people, what is the WCC...? What will they say? We have to decide what they will see before we can know what they will say.

Fulata Moyo: The theme of Karlsruhe 2022 is very important, for me, because when we say that it is Christ's love which moves the world to reconciliation and unity, we are rooting all our processes and referenda in the love of Christ rather than in our own institutional agendas. And what is the love of Christ? Let's remember 1 Corinthians 13, the letter of love that defines love in some very compelling, very challenging ways – love is patient, love is kind, it does not keep records of wrongs, it is not arrogant, it does not always think of pleasing itself, but it thinks of others. If *that* understanding of love is the basis of our reconciliation and unity, this for me is an enormous confrontation. We want to claim that the ecumenical movement and ecumenical institutions are being moved by *Christ's* love? Well, then we have to remember that Christ had to give everything up for the sake of his love. This could be a profound turning point for the ecumenical movement – *if* we really, seriously believe it.

True reconciliation means there needs to be truth-telling as well. That is a key lesson from South Africa and Rwanda – a lesson of how knowledge and acknowledgement are essential for healing relationships. "Knowledge" means that, if I say I want to reconcile with you, I should open my ears to hear your story, hear it without judgment, because I have to learn to put myself in your shoes and to hear your voice in such a way that I'm not always comparing it with my own experience. And if I am able to be fully present to hear what you know, then when I'm acknowledging that I have wronged you, I'm doing so with full knowledge of what you've told me of your experience – not merely acknowledging my own assessment of the situation. Here too the African churches have much to offer conceptually and

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methodologically. In Ubuntu ethics, we hear: “I am because you are. Since we are, therefore I am.” This means that your welfare is not only important to me but is also constitutive of who I am. So when I’m listening to you, I’m connected to you, and if you are hurting, I am also hurting, especially if I caused the hurt.

For me, I think what this Assembly theme is saying is that, if it really is Christ’s love that is leading me to desire and seek reconciliation and unity, then it is Christ’s agenda, not my own, which connects my well-being to your well-being. We are saying that we have to listen to Christ, to learn from Christ, and as St. Paul talks about it, to “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who shared the very nature of God but did not take equality with God as something that could be exploited, and he emptied himself and became like a servant” (Philippians 2:5-7). As a human being, I am prone to be selfish, and my worldview is limited, but we are talking here about Christ who really has walked this path before us, this path of reconciliation and unity with God and humanity and all creation. To root our reconciliation and unity in the love of Christ is to acknowledge that, while I have limitations, I totally depend on God and I am willing to take one step at a time, learning from God and trusting God completely, rather than idolizing my own understanding.

Aaron Hollander: When we are in a situation of mistrust, whether between individuals or between communities that have learned to mistrust one another – maybe for good reasons, because maybe there’s been abuse, there’s been violence in the past or present, there’s been asymmetry and exploitation – what then does it mean to rebuild that trust, if trust is a prerequisite for reconciliation? We can’t have reconciliation or peace without trust, because otherwise we can’t hear one another; as you’ve said, we can’t acknowledge one another’s experience if we don’t trust that they are articulating it truthfully.

Fulata Moyo: What it means is that truth has to be at the center, and we have to be willing not only to tell the truth but also to hear the truth of others, even or especially when it makes us uncomfortable. The reconciliation we seek will require us to talk about gender injustice, about racial injustice, about homophobia and xenophobia, about all the other “isms” that have governed us for a long time. So here’s an example: when I look at you across the table from me, what do I see? Do I see only my own reflection, the reflection of what I think I can get from you or of all the reasons you might represent something I resent? Do I see only some white American man full of privileges? Or do I see Christ in you? Do I see a personhood that is as real to me as I am to myself? Maybe our history would suggest that I should not trust you, but I can trust Christ who is in you. So, instead of focusing on all the grievances that have kept us

divided, I think this Assembly theme is saying: let’s be vulnerable together. Let one another’s truth be a liberation for us, rather than something that sends us into hiding because we don’t want to be vulnerable. Mutual vulnerability means that I am willing to suffer myself before hurting you – it means you are actually holding the essence of my dignity in your hands, and vice versa.

I think this Assembly theme is saying: let’s be vulnerable together. Let one another’s truth be a liberation for us, rather than something that sends us into hiding because we don’t want to be vulnerable.

Angelique Walker-Smith: Reconciliation, it seems to me, has to begin with truth-telling and with everyone having a safe and sacred space for people to express what that reconciliation means for them. We can’t assume that we all want the same thing from our relationships, or that we all believe our relationships will be healed in the same way. Historically, there have been those among us who have felt unwelcome to be authentically who they are, who have felt that they’re not being invited to the common table – in this case, the ecumenical agenda – even as they know who they are in Christ and they know that this lack of welcome is unjust. There is reconciliation work to be done within the ecumenical movement and within the WCC specifically, and that kind of reconciliation has to begin with the establishment of sacred space for people to be authentically who they are, together.

From the very beginning, the ecumenical movement has been challenged by the reality that those who had the privilege, the resources, and frankly the power to be able to create a privileged instrument for their own well-being have been incentivized to do so. If you look at the photographs of 1948, it’s pretty clear, isn’t it, who was welcome at the table, and what kinds of decisions would be made at that table? There were exceptions to the norm, of course – a few of those founding individuals came from communities who are still marginalized today, but the conditions of relationship in that early ecumenical environment were marked by a lack of mutuality. So it’s not the case that the people who

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are today talking about marginalization weren't there from the beginning, yet the way they were there was and remains marginal. They weren't really at the table where decisions were being made, where resources were provided, where their ideas and experiences were being taken seriously. In other words, the WCC has always had people that have been visible and people that have been invisible; they've been there, but *how* have they been there?

For the most part, people on the global margins have remained invisible in the establishment of ecumenical priorities; their voices have been literally heard, perhaps, but those voices are not centered in discussions of where we need to be. But the ecumenical movement has always been an evolution. Look at New Delhi, or look at Uppsala, where Dr. Martin Luther King was invited to speak. When we look at those assemblies, and all the more when we look at the assemblies of the last two decades, we absolutely see a situation that is evolving from what we saw in 1948.

Aaron Hollander: This is akin to what we've heard on occasion from the youth delegates at Karlsruhe: that even when there's been an effort to empower the youth to speak, this invitation doesn't necessarily imply that their voices are being hearkened to. Maybe they are heard, but they are not necessarily trusted – their own vision of ecumenical priorities and methodology is not sufficiently being taken on board, even if they are supposedly "empowered to speak." How does this situation of marginalization – whether of people on the margins of global power structures, or of the youth – affect what we mean when we talk about "reconciliation" or about "unity" as navigational polestars for the ecumenical community?

Konrad Raiser: The main difference between reconciliation and unity is that reconciliation is a relational term, while unity is a structural concept. The call to "visible unity" has historically been held in very high regard and promoted by a particular subset of the World Council of Churches, reflecting the investment of traditions with a

hierarchical understanding of the church. However, I think we have come to appreciate, and this Assembly's statement on unity underlines, that unity *too* must be considered as a process. Unity is not a static outcome that can be written into confessions or constitutions. Rather it is what we are constantly called to live out and affirm, and therefore reconciliation is an essential dimension of this process of working towards, living towards, unity. In reconciliation, we see unity and peace join forces.

Aaron Hollander: And with peace, we speak not only about peacemaking or bringing an end to conflict, but also about *peacebuilding* in the sense of a continual strengthening and re-negotiating of healthy relationships. So too, I imagine reconciliation is not only an overcoming of a history of violence or an overcoming of mistrust and then leaving it behind, but something more future-oriented, something more ongoing, organic, and upbuilding.

Konrad Raiser: We have to recapture the profound meaning of St. Paul's affirmation that in Christ, God has reconciled the world to himself. Our task is not to reinvent that reconciliation, but to live it, to spread it, to share it. Of course, dealing with violence is a crucial aspect of reconciliation, but it is not the only one. Reconciliation is needed in many situations, including those without open violence, and even those without hidden violence but where differences of fundamental interests and values lead to mistrust and antipathy. I consider it encouraging, therefore, that the WCC more and more understands itself as the body that provides space where that continuing process of reconciliation can bear fruit in the innumerable different situations of its participants.

Leanne Clelland: In the Iona Community, we conceive of reconciliation as a path, not as a destination. And that path undergirds the entirety of the rule of life by which members and associate members live. Our rule of life includes daily prayer and worship, supporting one another in prayer, and meeting regularly; it includes sharing a corporate life and collaborating between members' organizations, in other words, getting out and getting our hands dirty; and it includes working for justice and peace, for reconciliation in our locality, in society, and in creation. It's about transforming lives so they in turn can change the world in their own communities. And I understand this to be similar to how we've operated over this past week in Karlsruhe – where we have met together, prayed together, gotten to know each other as human beings (when we gather in small groups, we always check if people have eaten, how they've managed with the weather, and so forth), but have also come together to do serious work as delegates and participants and observers. It is a hopeful environment: we are entering together into the belief that not only is a new world possible, it's on its way.

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Alois Loeser: Sometimes we want to go too quickly. The gospel tells us to love our enemies, and so then we want to do that right away, and we insist on jumping to that place of loving our enemies, so we lose track of the way toward this love, which can be a long path. There are wounds that must be tended and bound, and reconciliation must happen in steps, not just in one jump. At Taizé, I listen to young people in the evening, when we remain in the church to listen to all those who want to speak more personally, and it's not rare that this question arises: "I cannot forgive somebody, but I know I must. I want to forgive and should forgive but cannot – what can I do?" And in such a situation it can feel like a liberation to hear, "you are walking a long road – forgiveness and reconciliation do not happen all at once." We have to take seriously the wounds that people have sustained; perhaps someone has been abused or betrayed. There must be justice, not only letting go. If we go too quickly, reconciliation will not be sustainable.

What matters is that the Gospel opens up our horizon, shows us that something other than this pain is possible. It may seem impossible, feel impossible, but it *is* possible, and the conviction that it is possible – because Jesus shows us what it looks like – can be sustaining when we can't see the way forward for ourselves.

2) On Contemporary Contextual Challenges

Aaron Hollander: One of the profound gifts of an ecumenical assembly of this size and diversity is the opportunity to put into conversation the great variety of local perspectives that do not reduce or resolve into one another, but remain alternative sources for evaluating ecumenical history, priorities, and methodology. So I'm interested in your perspective on the forms of division and the wounds in need of reconcil-

iation in your own context – and not only between communions, but also very much within communions, where ecumenical perspective and action are no less urgently needed. In what ways do you see local challenges as feeding into your work in the WCC, and vice versa? Is there something particular about our time together here in Karlsruhe that is going to inform how you return to your own ecclesial context and your investment in healing that context?

Konrad Raiser: I think the most difficult challenge that our churches in Germany are facing is to accept that they are at present a minority in a thoroughly secularized world. The imposing structures inherited from our glorious past become a hindrance rather than a help, and we have to recast thoroughly how we live as a Christian community – not only together with other traditions, but also within each of our communities. This reality is, of course, debated passionately in the Catholic Church, in Protestant Churches, and in the so-called free churches (Methodists, Baptists, and various others) as well. We have to reconfigure our witness as a Christian community in the situation in which we find ourselves socially and politically; as I perceive it, this is one of the fundamental challenges. It requires, among other things, liberating ourselves from the weight, the authority, and the remembered splendor of this notion of *Volkskirche* or an established church of a whole people – which we shared with the Scandinavian countries and to some extent with the Church of England – and this is a very difficult process. I think that the churches in Europe also have to rethink their voice in the ecumenical movement, recognizing that they may be losing the central place that they have had historically – which is in fact a good thing, because it signifies that the membership of the great Council has broadened considerably. The landscape is changing, and we have to adapt.

Aaron Hollander: It was thirty years ago now that you published *Ecumenism in Transition*, a landmark work in our field. It may be premature to tell, especially given the still-unfolding impact of the pandemic, but when you look around at the state of ecumenical study and work, do you see signs of the emergence of a new paradigm in the methods, values, and goals of ecumenical engagement, or are we continuing to live out a paradigm that is declining in interpretive and motivational potential? I'm very curious about how you would assess the state of the WCC, for instance, in terms of your paradigm-shift model for the gradual erosion and replacement of frameworks for making sense out of what we do.

Konrad Raiser: Some of the perspectives that I tried to outline in that book have in fact been incorporated into the work of the WCC over the last 30 years – in particular, my advocacy for shifting from a Christo-monistic/Christo-

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centric understanding of the church, which was very much rooted in evangelical traditions, to a fully Trinitarian understanding. I was a bit concerned by the formulation of the theme for Karlsruhe, because it appears to pull us back into the tradition of Christo-centrism by its emphasis on Christ's compassion. It risks – but only risks – taking us away from the fact that Jesus Christ is the visible manifestation of the love of God. It's the love of God that sustains the world. To be motivated by Christ's love specifically is not to deny this fundamental affirmation, but it needs to be acknowledged explicitly – and we were, I think, very close to acknowledging it. I am curious to see how things will continue from here.

Leanne Clelland: I come from Northern Ireland originally, where reconciliation has been a hard road. It was twenty-five years ago now that the Good Friday Agreement was signed, and the older I get, the more I realize how precarious and frightening a route it was – and continues to be, actually, because peacemaking is one thing, but the peacebuilding that follows is just as hard. It has been very interesting to be here as an Iona Community observer in the last week, particularly insofar as our vision is to create spaces for justice and peace, where members and friends and associates can find their lives and relationships transformed so they can change their world. I see much of this process enacted in Karlsruhe as well: it's been a real privilege to sit in on some of the small-group conversations and of course the plenary meetings as well, and to see how the intellectual discussions are integrated with the worship and the unstructured social time.

For example, on Thursday or Friday morning, we discussed the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan. I loved the staging of that morning, how we entered into the spiritual imagination in terms of the story of the Good Samaritan and considered what it meant for all to be welcomed and for all to be known, and I loved how the worship invited us to imagine ourselves among the various characters in that story – the man who had fallen victim, those who walked passed, and the one who stopped to help. But neither the discussion nor the worship would really have had the chance to be transformative apart from the social context of our gathering, namely that we were surrounded by church leaders who had to face one another in light of their own actions in relation to those who are suffering around them. This kind of space is so needed along the hard road to peace – as we saw again and again in Northern Ireland, and as we strive now to build in Iona.

Alois Loeser: I must say, I am inspired by the presence of the Russian delegation here in Karlsruhe, in spite of the terrible crisis in Ukraine. It is a good sign in itself, already, that they are here alongside the many Ukrainian participants – but it is an opportunity that must not be squandered. I mention this because, at Taizé, we have attempted over

the last year to be a space where Russians and Ukrainians could be together at peace, where they could meet and listen to one another. It is not easy, but this is deep in the purpose of who we are. It was similar during the Balkan War in Europe; we had Serbians and Croats together at Taizé, and they really profited from being able to speak together. Sometimes it was very, very hard, but when they came to understand the suffering of the other person, when they listened to the suffering of the other person and vice versa, then something happened – each came to suffer as well because of the suffering of the other, and in that moment empathy connected them, even though they might still disagree starkly in a cognitive way.

Fulata Moyo: There is a danger in any process of reconciliation that is too focused on the end goals of resolution and peace, which is that it will sacrifice the demands of justice when the going gets too hard. We learned this lesson from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, when three hundred cases were referred to go through the legal justice system, but these cases were withdrawn because the commissioners wanted to focus on reconciliation, rather than pursuing the punitive way of justice. Well-intentioned though this was, it meant that they were effectively saying "yes, we hear you, but we will sacrifice your demand to the good of the nation, and we will pursue reconciliation in a way that it bypasses justice, punitive or otherwise."

So too, this is a danger here in Karlsruhe, where we are (for instance) talking about women and women's involvement in ecumenical and community leadership. Women have been disadvantaged over many years, and whatever we do now to remedy that would have to include elements of what would be called "positive discrimination." That is, some men have to step away from the table, they have to step away and create space, if they are serious about women's involvement in leadership – but we know the list of the names of those who want to be on the new Central Committee, and women are only about 22% of that list. What does that mean? Can we say in good faith that Christ's love compels us to reconciliation and unity when we keep on sacrificing women and avoiding the difficult conversations about what a *just* approach to ecumenical and institutional leadership will require?

Angelique Walker-Smith: In terms of this reverberation you're describing, between the gathering in Karlsruhe and the many ecclesial contexts that we're coming from and going back to with new orientation, I think the devotional life here in Karlsruhe is especially important. Every morning, we gather in prayer and we invite God's presence into our midst; it's a crucial question for our own contexts, how we are inviting people into devotional life and sustaining that communal life together. The second resonance is in

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how we are calling out our stories and sharing them with one another. Every day this week we've been naming our stories, trying to convene a space for storytelling that feeds into both the shared prayer but also into the breakout groups where we have more candid discussions about the challenges we face. So, for example, I've been a moderator on the theme of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. In that group, telling and hearing personal stories from delegates' own contexts have enabled us to have deeper conversations than would otherwise have been possible. This dance that we've been conducting in Karlsruhe – between devotional life, personal storytelling, and intellectual labor, all in the presence of people who are so different from us – is an inspiring and instructive model for ecumenical engagement.

Aaron Hollander: Is that a model that is adequate to the kinds of conversations that need to be had in the United States? Recent ecumenical conversations in the American context have, of course, had to reckon with the sense not only that our society is divided politically and culturally (as it has been for a long time) but also that our civic institutions are corroded and not up to the challenge of peacekeeping on their own.

Angelique Walker-Smith: I think what we've got here is only a starting point. It's not enough to leave the table having only told stories and prayed together, if we haven't also been working to figure out what it means to be converted. How have we changed one another, and what have we heard and learned that can help us walk more closely with those we've been praying with, those with whom we've shared our stories – with whom, perhaps, we also share a history of grievance and violence? It is not enough to listen. Papers are not enough, and declarations are not enough. The young people are right: we need action.

Peter Cook: For me, the experience of being with Christians from all around the world in one place, under the guidance and the movement of the Holy Spirit, is a re-

markable experience that I don't think most Americans (or certainly, most American Christians) have even imagined. The practice of listening to one another in full attentiveness to our differences, holding ourselves accountable to authenticity and open-mindedness in that conversation, is a powerful witness to how we need to be the church together in the world. I'm struck by how the issues that the WCC is addressing on a global scale are quite similar to the ones that we care about locally, in the New York State Council of Churches: environmental justice, racial equity and economic justice, questions of war and peace, the abuses of money and weaponry, poverty and other threats to sustainable communities. What is different here, though, is that it makes a powerful impression to see all of the different delegations weighing in on these questions from such an enormous variety of perspectives.

In the US, each denomination too often tends to work in its own silo. We all have our denominational shingle and our PR campaigns, and we might hold programs to try to bring different communities together, but such programs are often ad hoc rather than systematically linked or collaboratively designed. So to have this experience in Karlsruhe – that there's far more benefit to working together than separately, and to acknowledge that we are in fact working on many of the same things and working to strengthen one another for the challenges we each face in different ways – opens an awareness that we are often lacking in our home contexts. So many insights can arise from seeing how another community engages with analogous issues.

In our American context and the New York context specifically, the elephant in the room really has to do with racial disparity and how to name the legacy of that disparity appropriately. How has the disease of slavery in the United States created a footprint for the lack of economic growth and political inclusion among Black Americans, and how have the churches been beneficiaries of the slavery system? Some of our churches were built by slaves themselves; others were active proponents of inequitable policies or at least were strangely silent when it came to fighting them. And these dynamics are far from ended: the economics of slavery were in significant ways transplanted to a system of mass incarceration, where Black Americans have been disproportionately targeted and charged, including for the most minor violations, as a way to create a cheap labor force, terrorize and marginalize an already-exploited population, and maintain inter-generational inequalities. So what does reconciliation look like in this context? Certainly, the reparations discussion is part of this, but I think it also requires looking at how that system rooted in slavery has rotted out the social contract and more than one of our institutions.

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One element that is preventing us from moving forward is, clearly, the political polarization within as well as beyond the churches. These conversations are so fraught that we are reluctant even to begin them, especially if they require having conversations with people we don’t already agree with. The divisions manifesting among our local churches may pertain to racial disparity, but it’s the corrosion of our political environment more generally that prevents the kinds of conversations that are needed in order to make concrete moves.

But at a deeper level, we have to realize that the moral fortitude necessary for making hard choices as communities, choices which may not benefit us directly, is often lacking in our churches. Each of the nine denominations in the New York Council of Churches has its own anti-racism task force – which is itself instructive, that we are working in parallel but struggle to create something truly collaborative on an ecumenical level. In any case, we have lots of book studies and self-examination about our racism, and maybe someone has been to the six-part book study at their church in New York about how not to be racist, but then somebody else comes along and wants to build affordable housing in their neighborhood and they freak out! And they organize members of their church to oppose the initiative. “Well, I’m committed to racial justice, just not in my neighborhood.”

Aaron Hollander: This is where *formation* would seem to come in: providing the trellis for growing coherent and sustainable spiritual dispositions from which ethical action can flow, thus bridging the gap between Christian rhetoric and Christian discipleship. Such formation, I’m happy to say, is our next topic of conversation.

3) On Ecumenical Formation

Aaron Hollander: In a reflection on the Assembly theme that she helped to frame, Susan Durber wrote (in *Ecumenical Trends* 51.1) about how ecumenism needs more than *ortho-*

doxy, in the sense of hashing out mutually acceptable doctrinal formulations, and it needs more than *orthopraxy*, in the sense of identifying arenas of collaborative action where we can agree are necessary to work together. It also needs what Durber called *orthokardia*: a realignment of the heart towards one another, towards God, and towards the world.

In keeping with this dimension of the Assembly theme, it seems to me, one of the distinguishing features of this gathering is the way that our discussions, our frameworks for encounter, and even the theme itself center the *ecumenism of the heart* in significant ways. I’m not only referring to “spiritual ecumenism” in the way that this tends to be spoken about in terms of shared prayer and other such practices, but also more fundamentally to the ways that coherent ecumenism begins with being interrupted by or reoriented toward one another’s existence such that the other modes of engagement become desirable and possible. And although the impetus for this movement may indeed be Christ’s love, it will not sweep us along into perfect harmony without our cooperation; even a profound conversion needs to be sustained by our behavior, our habits, and our institutions. In this respect, I’m reminded constantly of St. Paul’s aphorism that “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:19). Real changes of life are *hard*, especially so when the life is that of a community; and it is not only personal inconvenience or political unfashionability that keep us from reconciling and building new relationships with one another, but we are regularly blocked by our own dispositions even when we understand and desire the changes in question.

So I want to ask about cultivating the dispositions (or one might call them the virtues or the character) that are needed to realign the heart toward the ecumenical horizon. In your view, what are the ways that we can cultivate the strength and sustain the orientation towards one another that are necessary to move forward?

Alois Loiser: Two things come to my mind. One is that our theology needs to become more humble. We do not have to mistake our grasp on God’s truth for the truth itself. In our theology, God is always greater than our knowledge of him, but we so easily forget this and so our theology becomes arrogant, allowing us to believe that we do not need to listen to others’ formulations of the truth or to respect the unique experience of each person. And as I learned from Br. Roger [of Taizé], it’s not just about respect: when we consider the value of each person that we meet, we have to push past all that our society or even our own tradition tells us we should think about that person, and we have to recognize that this person has eternal value. This transforms how we are able to listen to this person. Br. Roger would have

One element that is preventing us from moving forward is, clearly, the political polarization within as well as beyond the churches. These conversations are so fraught that we are reluctant even to begin them, especially if they require having conversations with people we don’t already agree with.

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liked this expression, *orthokardia*, and he spoke about what it signifies in different ways – for example, that Christ did not come to found a new religion that is against other religions, but rather that the love of God is accessible for each human being, for every human being is in the heart of God. The church is as wide, as large as humanity.

Realignments of the heart happen at Taizé. We don't even fully understand all the reasons why it happens, because it is not something we have created or brought about with our work. But there are different elements of our way of life that, as you say, helps to sustain it. Our common prayer makes abundant space for silence, and when you are there, alongside others, you can be free. People also feel that the building itself, the layout of the church, is at the heart of the experience of Taizé; the brothers are never at the front during the prayer, preaching to the people. Instead, we are all looking in the same direction; even during the Eucharist, the priest only goes to the front when he speaks the words of consecration before the assembly. Other than that, we are in an open space together, turning together towards God in our prayer.

I also think that this ecumenism of the heart is strengthened by the fact that people know they can come to Taizé and speak about their life with somebody who will listen deeply and without judgment. We have too often lost this deep listening in the church, and it has become the purview of the psychologists only – but the church has to be a place of listening to people at length. This is in part why life at Taizé is structured as it is – people who come there live together for one week, praying and eating and working together, in simplicity. Simplicity too is crucial, because it reminds us that we need each other and everybody has to help one another. There is a joy that comes in the sharing of daily life, which should not be underestimated; joy opens us to the Word of God and to one another, more so than fear or instruction. In other words, “formation,” in the sense that we're discussing, isn't a matter of telling people what they have to believe. It is the provision of space and freedom to be shaped by one another and opened to one another, to search together for God's presence.

And finally, the cross. Every Friday, we pray together around the cross – we have done this every Friday since 1977, when Br. Roger went to Russia for the first time. After experiencing worship in Russia, he came back and said that we could pray with an icon in the Orthodox fashion, and he had this idea of laying the cross horizontal on the ground so that everybody could come forward and put their forehead to the cross and pray with their whole body. We never get tired of this prayer; it's as if people are led to the very center of their faith, and it has much to do with their healing, their reconciliation with themselves as much as with others and with God. On the cross, Christ carries our burdens.

We have too often lost this deep listening in the church, and it has become the purview of the psychologists only – but the church has to be a place of listening to people at length.

Aaron Hollander: That's so important. My own most vivid memory of being at Taizé is of that veneration of the cross at the center of the church. You've spoken about shared suffering being a point of contact or a point of empathy for people who come together across lines of enmity. The cross too, in this sense, becomes a magnetic pole around which people can relativize their own sufferings. Instead of my grievances being the cornerstone of my identity and agenda, here I can lay them at the foot of the cross, and my brothers and sisters can do the same. My enemies can do the same. There's much more that could be said about how grief, and what the desert fathers referred to as the “gift of tears,” can be a crucible of ecumenical realignment.

Peter Cook: I was so struck by how the Prior from Taizé, Br. Alois, spoke about shared prayer in the plenary session. If our ecumenical interactions remain defined by description or prescription, by assessing needs and laboring to resolve them, our relationships will remain instrumental and we will burn out. We have to pray together; when we lead with the heart, the hands and feet will follow.

But I also want to insist that building a more just world for all people – so people don't have to worry about their health or their housing, their food or their medical care – is not some afterthought to ecumenical reconciliation. It's the gospel. What good is ecumenism of the heart, of reconciled relationships, if we are not then going to live the gospel and bring good news for the poor, emancipation for the imprisoned, healing for the sick, and liberation for the oppressed? So often we become trapped in the idea about social programs that they're separate from the meaning and purpose of the church – but God's economy is the flourishing of abundant life for all people. We forget that love begets more love and justice begets more justice; similarly, hate begets more hate and stinginess begets more stinginess. We needn't live in a cynical, zero-sum system where it's at our expense if someone else gains. But we need to practice seeing and living the alternative, because our political systems

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and cultural norms keep us believing that someone else’s gain is my loss, even though the gospel shows us precisely the opposite.

Leanne Clelland: A couple of weeks ago, the Iona Community had what we call Community Week, where over 100 members, those who are the most engaged, meet together. And we had some truly vibrant conversations about gender and race, about climate, about the path ahead for our communities. These are really smart, clued-in people with hands ready to work, an eye on the world, and a real heart for change – not just a heart but an energy and a drive. And that energy comes from the heart, but hearts have to be filled in order to flow. So we were speaking in that context not only about the importance of organization and regular meetings, but also about the recognition that we have *sung* about peace and reconciliation for years and years. For forty years, the Iona Community has been combining the spiritual and the pragmatic, learning how to use prosaic language and media alongside sacred language and media in order to perceive the world as it is being transformed into God’s Kingdom to come. This legacy has been incredibly instrumental for us – it’s about teaching the heart to sing so that it is motivated to act, so that we are drawn into living the words that we have sung, enacting our spiritual perception in pragmatic ways.

The leaders of the community call this “inreach” and “outreach”: *inreach* being the absorption of the liturgy, the songs, and the rule of life, sharing that life together and lighting a fire in our hearts, in order then to reach out our hands to the world in need, in whatever ways are needed in particular places and times.

Konrad Raiser: The cultivation of ecumenical virtue requires that a praxis be built and refined and continually corrected. For example (on this large scale of the World Council), some 20 years ago, inspired to an extent by inten-

sive conversations with the Orthodox, the WCC adopted its current method of consensus-based decision-making. For some, a commitment to consensus seems to stifle the kinds of confrontation that are necessary for productive dialogue and the challenges that need to be articulated, because being challenged is indeed very important for effecting a change of heart. But I think it is a limited, if not a defective, anthropology or psychology that cannot reconcile consensus with challenging and being challenged. The practice of respecting others and even letting others touch my heart by the authenticity of what they say may effect changes in both our positions that otherwise – at least by analytical work and by political slogans and by campaigns – would hardly be achieved.

But consensus methodology is only one such praxis for the realignment of hearts. There are other models for *metanoia*, for changes of heart, that we need to rediscover. So I’m very glad that the commission has centered these issues in their formulation and meditation on the Assembly theme – it’s so helpful, and I hope it doesn’t get lost as the fruits of the Assembly continue to be interpreted and applied hereafter.

Aaron Hollander: It seems as though everything we’re speaking about requires a kind of humility that doesn’t come naturally or easily. The ascetic tradition would say that our willingness or even our ability to decenter our own priorities is blocked or made murky by the poisoned condition of our hearts (poisoned, that is, by demonic “passions” or tainted habits of thought). And therefore, patient and painstaking and prayerful work on ourselves is required before we can repair our relationships. But this way of thinking itself provides an alternative to how interchurch or intra-church conflict is often discussed. Where there is a relationship of enmity between individuals, communities, or cultures, the norm (which is incentivized and rewarded in various ways) is to view one another in contemptuous and even dehumanizing ways. But if we can perceive that we aren’t ultimately enemies to each other but rather have *both* been trapped by histories and frameworks of understanding that diminish us both by turning us against each other, this can be a liberating way of meeting somebody that we have hated or feared without falling back into the same old grounds for antagonism. The ascetic tradition also reminds us that interpersonal and intercultural humility isn’t just a matter of *wanting* to love our enemies or to set aside the prideful, self-prioritizing habits to which we are accustomed. There is an exorcism involved. We have to uproot something that has taken root in ourselves – or to hold ourselves open for others, and for God, to uproot it.

Fulata Moyo: What you’re speaking of is an exorcism of love and mutual vulnerability. In traditions that practice

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exorcism, typically the person practicing spiritual healing is in a position of power, the position of a healer or rescuer, but in this case, we are exorcizing each other. We are all possessed in one way or another. So we have come to this pool of Christ’s love, where it is really Christ’s love that is delivering us, for it is happening in ways that are not really controlled by our behavior, and yet the level of our vulnerability is intimately related to the extent that our encounters with one another will be healing. This vulnerability does not come easily – it is deeply uncomfortable, and it has to be nurtured.

Angelique Walker-Smith: Leadership has to call for new ways of seeing – that’s what it means to be a leader today. “Evolutionary leadership” is what I called it when I gave my presentation to the North American contingent – people who see and read the times, people who see and read what is possible when others don’t see it. Leadership is being able to speak out of that seeing in a way that opens others’ eyes, but also being part of a cadre that can *do* something about it and move us forward. Is not enough to dream and speak. We could talk about the Civil Rights Movement, or about the fall of the Berlin Wall – any of these transformative changes required a cadre of people who could step out in front, into the void, where they could see a way forward and call others into living those new possibilities, while taking tangible steps themselves.

Aaron Hollander: The Finnish delegate, yesterday, spoke about this in terms of the saints. This is what the saints do: they see the alternative to the world as it is, and they live into it in a way that jars others out of their complacency. But there’s a missing piece here, I think: we can have these charismatic models – whether leaders or saints – moving forward and inviting others to follow, but at the same time, how do we cultivate this ethos in the churches at large, not only in the isolated visionaries? As I’ve mentioned to others, I keep coming back to St. Paul’s insight that “I do not

do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” I can assent intellectually to this idea that I want to listen to others and change my relationship with them, and I want to de-prioritize myself and uplift those who are disproportionately affected by war or climate change or what have you, but when push comes to shove, I’m far more likely to stay the comfortable course.

Angelique Walker-Smith: I think that young people are the key. I grew up in a church where we did not ordain women. But when I was called to my ministry, my father experienced real *metanoia*. He did not believe that women should be ordained, and then he was changed. “Oh, it’s my daughter... I was blind, and now I see.” I think our children have the potential to be the catalyst for *metanoia* on a much larger scale – young people today are so courageous, so bold. Look at the young people at this Assembly in Karlsruhe: they’re speaking the truth in love here at the Assembly, and challenging us in ways whose long-term effects we cannot anticipate.

Joy Eva Bohol: What I see now, working with young people, is that there is a deep need to cultivate humility in the ecumenical establishment. I’m not at all saying that older generations are not important, but what we need right now in the WCC is real co-leadership, with more inclusive spaces for all people to be heard and their ideas considered at length. It’s not enough to look to existing leadership, because how has that leadership been formed? Who has been afforded the opportunity to lead and who has not? We talk and talk about the plight of people in the Pacific, and yet, not one Pacific Islander is at the table with WCC leadership to clarify how things are there and how we should respond; in the same way, it’s meaningless to talk about the future of the church if young people are not at the table. And not just included, but *trusted*. For instance, during the first two Assembly plenaries last week, three young people were included as respondents to the keynotes of older, established ecumenists. I understand why this would be the case, but the establishment also has to be humble enough to commit to sharing the space, and to recognize, trust, and respect that young people have expertise to share and not just opinions in response to others’ expertise.

Aaron Hollander: I’ve heard this latter paradigm described as a “preferential option for the future”; in other words, what’s needed is not even equal representation, but rather a recognition that we are moving inexorably into a future that is being handed over, but too slowly. What choices might be made as a result of that recognition, that preferential option?

Joy Eva Bohol: We will never find out, if there aren’t careful recalibrations of leadership to include younger

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generations at every level. There’s a lot we can and do say about the WCC’s priorities – about listening to the marginalized, about a church for the poor, and so forth. If you have read the pre-Assembly statements, they are very strong in this respect. But will they be heard? If there is no proper representation of marginalized voices – young people, indigenous people, people living with disabilities – among the leadership, what will actually be prioritized when difficult choices need to be made?

Aaron Hollander: If this kind of intergenerational transition and empowerment is successful – and I’m just asking you to speculate, of course – what do you think the WCC looks like, and what does the ecumenical movement look like, in 2050? In the next generation after this one, what looks different, and what remains divisive?

Joy Eva Bohol: I think in 2050 we are going to be more proactive and more prophetic. Proactive, because if we really succeed in bringing people from the margins into positions of leadership, then the core commitments of the WCC to addressing the world’s needs through faithful action will never be ignored or sidelined. Prophetic, because when people see that Christians are united in making a visible difference for the better in the world, are delivering on our commitment to care for creation, to safeguard peace and human rights, to stand for justice around the world, it shakes things up and cracks begin to appear in the assumptions people have about the way the world has to be. We will probably have more enemies, perhaps particular governments and certainly big corporations that are profiting from destroying the planet and exploiting communities. But the churches have enormous lobbying power, and if, for instance, the United Methodist Church (my own church) started divesting from fossil fuels and exploitative resource extraction, it would make an enormous difference. At least we wouldn’t be playing it safe.

Aaron Hollander: Were you there for the local churches’ presentation following the second day of pilgrimages? They kept coming back to a rallying cry of Huldrych Zwingli during the Protestant Reformation: “For God’s sake, do something brave!” I’ve argued that *courage* is something that the ecumenical community can’t afford to downplay or take for granted.² What if Zwingli’s rallying cry were the next watchword for the WCC?


The problem, of course, is what it’s always been: being *unified* enough as a worldwide confederation of churches that such a coherent, pragmatic, and prophetic global witness would be possible. Is there a vision of ecumenical unity that is adequate for the WCC that you’re describing, the WCC of the future? Or is that sustainable vision of unity also yet to emerge?

Joy Eva Bohol: The definition or vision of unity is a

fascinating problem precisely because it is so difficult to define – and it always has been. I don’t know how Jesus envisioned it, when he prayed “that they all may all one” (John 17:21). All be one... in what sense? But I do know that, in order to have any hope of unity, we’d first have to *reconcile* among ourselves and to make that the priority. After reconciliation, renewal in the churches – because our divisions and antagonisms have diminished us and clouded our witness. And only then can we think seriously and coherently about unity – without being reconciled and renewed, how do we even know what we’re talking about when we talk about unity?

Aaron Hollander: In other words, it’s premature and potentially damaging to declare a vision of unity before walking the difficult road of reconciliation together, because any vision of unity that is articulated preemptively is one grounded in self-prioritizing interpretations of the church, of God, and of the world. But if reconciliation and renewal are prioritized and brought into the foreground, that transforms not only communities and political relationships but hearts and minds as well. We become capable of imagining and articulating unity in ways that we cannot do currently.

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Joy Eva Bohol: And reconciliation isn’t even the first step. We need to repent before we can reconcile, because reconciliation without genuine repentance is unsustainable; it will not lead to renewal that is led and fed by the Spirit. Repentance, too, requires bravery. “For God’s sake, do something brave!” 

Notes:

1. See Susan Durber, “A New Theme for the World Council of Churches: Toward a Heartfelt Ecumenism,” *Ecumenical Trends* 51.1 (2022): 14-17.
2. See Aaron T. Hollander, “The Courage to Harken: Ecumenism and the Underside of Modernity,” *Ecumenical Trends* 48.2 (2019): 1-13.

Habits of the Heart: Ecumenical Formation and the Way of Reconciliation

By Justin Welby and Aaron Hollander

Aaron Hollander, for *Ecumenical Trends*: Your Grace, it's a joy and an honor to have the opportunity to speak with you in the midst of your busy schedule here in Karlsruhe, where we are gathered for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. In the course of covering the Assembly for *Ecumenical Trends*, I've found that my priority is less to offer any kind of journalistic retelling of the affairs of each day and more to draw out resonances and dissonances between the enormously diverse perspectives of the representatives that have come together here from so many different churches. With this as my goal, I've been posing many of the same questions, albeit in different ways, to the delegates and observers I've met, and I'm keenly interested in your perspective on the core problem of digesting the Assembly theme – designed to be broadly evocative and with maximum generality across communities – into your own ecclesial context, given that you are a principal leader and ceremonial head of a worldwide communion of more than 85 million people (among whom I count myself).

First, I'm hoping you would speak to the substantial ecumenical challenge of divisions within churches that might nevertheless be expected to engage coherently in interchurch conversations and collaborations. We are here in Germany dedicated to the difficult work of healing relationships and building relationships between our church communities – and yet, within each of these configurations, there are active fault lines of anger and suspicion, betrayals of trust, misuses of authority, incompatible schools of thought, contradictory and disoriented moral and political compasses, and so forth. So I want to ask: what do you see as the relationship between the processes of *interchurch* reconciliation that have historically dominated the ecumenical movement, and that primarily occupy the Assembly in Karlsruhe, and the profound need for reconciliation *within* our church communities – which are hurting, and breaking, and failing to enact Christlike love even (or especially) among themselves? What will you, personally, bring back from this Assembly that you hope will be fruitful in your own approach to addressing division within the Anglican Communion?

Justin Welby: I think that I will bring back from Karlsruhe one principle which is not new, and which you've commented on: that within every ecclesial body, whether the Roman Catholic Church or an independent Pentecostal church, there will always be tensions. It's part of being human. And I suppose I would want to argue two things – of one of which the opposite was said this morning, though I can't recall who it was who suggested that we need to

deal with our own problems separately from our interchurch affairs. I'm not entirely sure that I would agree with that – which is an English way of saying that I disagree with that. And I think that the first and most important thing we do is to come back to the mission of God, the *missio Dei*. It is the call of the Church in its life, its words, and its actions to carry the good news of Jesus Christ to all the world – and to engage the greatest needs of the world, as Jesus himself did. The deepest fellowship I've had with the Holy Father, Pope Francis I, and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Rev. Dr. Iain Greenshields, has not been when we've been sitting facing each other, it's been when we were alongside each other engaging with the war in South Sudan. When we look outwards together, we begin to find more ways of reconciliation within our church life. The Spirit works between us to provide healing, which can become a collateral benefit to our shared service to the world. That's my first answer.

The second thing I would say is – look outward and get on with the work that God has given us, but do the arguing amongst ourselves *while* we're doing the work, rather than getting stuck arguing, hoping that within our denomination we will eventually reach sufficient consensus to take action.

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The Most Rev. Justin Welby is the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was ordained in 1992 after an eleven-year career in the oil industry. He spent his first fifteen years serving in Coventry diocese, often in places of significant deprivation. In 2002 he was made a Canon of Coventry Cathedral, where he jointly led its international reconciliation work. During this time he worked extensively in Africa and the Middle East. Archbishop Justin has had a passion for reconciliation and peacemaking ever since. He was Dean of Liverpool from 2007 to 2011 and Bishop of Durham from 2011 to 2012, before being announced as the 105th Archbishop of Canterbury in late 2012.

Dr. Aaron T. Hollander is Editor of Ecumenical Trends, Associate Director of Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute, and Adjunct Faculty in Theology at Fordham University. In 2022, he was elected President of the North American Academy of Ecumenists; additionally, he serves on the steering committee of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network and on the faculty of the Summer Course in Ecumenism at the Centro Pro Unione in Rome. He is a scholar of ecumenical theology and lived religion, educated at the University of Chicago (PhD 2018), the Irish School of Ecumenics (Trinity College Dublin), and Swarthmore College.

When we look outwards together, we begin to find more ways of reconciliation within our church life. The Spirit works between us to provide healing, which can become a collateral benefit to our shared service to the world.

This is why, at the most recent Lambeth Conference, we described our agenda not as “Resolve all our disagreements so we can finally get around to living the Gospel,” but simply as “God’s Church for God’s World.” In other words, it is a normative part of being church to find that we are in disagreement. Among the key steps to reconciliation is learning the arts, the skills, of being able to create safe spaces where we can disagree strongly and truthfully – and we have often been bad at that. People often think that, by expressing themselves on Twitter in 140 characters, they’ve made a good case for whatever happens to be the issue at hand – anything from same-sex marriage, to changes in the liturgy, to disestablishing the Church of England and getting rid of the Archbishop of Canterbury (quite a frightening prospect!). And I think one of the key things about such a gathering as this – in Karlsruhe, but so too at the sites of previous Assemblies in Busan, Porto Alegre, and so forth – is that the organizers are getting better, having learned some of the arts of creating, even in a huge assembly, good safe space. It doesn’t always work, but it often does. There’s a long way to go, but this is one of the ways that we find resources for inward healing at the very same time that we’re engaged in interchurch reconciliation. We look outwards together, and we learn the skills of reconciliation that can be applied inward – but this won’t just *happen*. We have to be intentional about it.

AH: This leads directly to my second question. You’ve spoken about *disagreeing well*, which is such a powerful focusing concept – it’s not stamping out disagreement, but disagreeing in good faith, disagreeing in reciprocal love and commitment in spite of our disagreement. But as you say, such good-faith and productive disagreement is not easy and it’s not going to happen automatically: it’s disincentivized by so much of our culture and by the many pressures we experience to fortify our own identities by juxtaposing them antagonistically with those who do not share them. So my second question is about ecumenical formation – about the cultivation of ecumenical dispositions toward one another that have to come to undergird (even if they do not necessarily precede) any productive engagement. Susan Durber,

in her reflection on the Karlsruhe 2022 Assembly theme, wrote about how we need to deal not solely with *orthodoxy*, in the sense of a reconciliation and alignment of our ideas, nor solely with *orthopraxy*, in the sense of a reconciliation and alignment of our actions, but also and perhaps especially with what she calls *orthokardia*: the reconciliation and realignment of our hearts toward one another and toward our understanding of how we fit together with those others, who are unlike us and who yet somehow belong to us as we do to them.¹ And so I want to ask about what you see as the way of cultivating such *orthokardia*. More specifically, what would you identify as some – if not distinctively, at least authentically – Anglican resources, out of your tradition, for inspiring and sustaining that reorientation of the heart toward one another?

JW: Immediately I would point to common prayer, in the way the Anglicans have developed the importance of a non-eucharistic (I should say, not solely eucharistic) pattern of praying together – a pattern derived from the monasteries but significantly changed during the Reformation. My experience as a priest is that communities of people who pray together, whether in cathedrals or parishes, learn to disagree more effectively. One of the first questions I ask when working in a church that is having real problems is: “Where’s your common prayer?” And when they say, “well, we don’t have common prayer,” I know that this is where they need to start. “But don’t we need to solve our problems before we can pray together authentically?” No – you need to pray together or you will never solve your problems.

So prayer is the most important thing. But I would also offer a few modern examples of practices and processes undertaken precisely to cultivate this realignment of the heart, this capacity for good-faith disagreement grounded in love.

First, I would commend people to look at how we have dealt with – or rather, how we are dealing with, and of course I don’t know whether and to what extent this process will be successful – the significant disagreements over human sexuality in the Anglican Communion. Much can be learned from the faults and the successes of the Living in Love and Faith Program (LLF), which is a major theological, pastoral, and, now, parish-based project, which has been running since about 2017. It started with deep work on the theology of human identity and sexuality, in conversation with biological science and biblical studies, and in light of historical, patristic approaches to sexuality and identity. After that we started mixing the groups – taking people from many different social contexts, placing them together in groups, facilitating those groups’ conversations, and from that we produced a book called *Living in Love and Faith* and a course of the same name.² All of this will lead into what we do next, after discussion with the bishops; and these studies

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and conversations will shape our approach going forward, including what decisions, if any, are made at the ecclesiastical level. I’m convinced that there are plenty of faults with this process, but I would still commend it as an example of a carefully structured, carefully executed way of approaching one of the most sensitive issues that is dividing our church.

Second, I would highlight what we call the Difference Course, which has been published by the Church of England – it was designed by colleagues of mine at Lambeth.³ The Difference Course is entirely aimed at changing practices of the heart, changing habits of perception, judgment, and care. I’ve done the course, it had a huge impact on me, and it seems to have a huge impact wherever it is undertaken. We’re developing the course for use across the Anglican Communion – it’s being used in the States, in southern Africa, in east Asia – and while it is certainly Anglican in some areas of its style and ethos, it is not meant to be proprietary but could be an Anglican offering for the sake of addressing a much broader ecumenical need.

AH: This is enormously interesting to us at Graymoor, as we are in the early stages of developing a course in ecumenical formation ourselves, for religious leaders (and those in training for leadership) in New York and potentially more broadly as well. It sounds like we’re thinking about this in similar ways, and that we’re talking at least in part – although it’s not a terribly popular concept and perhaps it needs to be branded rather differently for a formation course! – about *asceticism*. Do you see a place for ecumenical asceticism, in the sense of spiritual exercise that reshapes our habits of being and knowing and acting in relationship to one another, that helps us get out of the way of ourselves so that the love of God can flow through us and not get jammed up in all our self-serving, acquisitive, prideful instincts?


JW: Yes, that’s certainly one way of looking at it, although the three core practices taught by the Difference

Course are by no means limited to the ascetic tradition – they are, first, to be *curious* about those from whom we are different; second, to be *present* to those from whom we are different, and third, to *reimagine* what that difference could look like and what it might mean for us in the future. But you’re right that the ascetic tradition offers a meaningful paradigm, not least when it’s distilled down to this wonderful turn of phrase, *orthokardia*.

The last example I would give is that we have to learn – and this isn’t solely an Anglican practice either – to tap into the day-to-day ecumenical energy, to recognize it where we see it, to trust it, and empower it to provide organic, living momentum toward the reconciliation we seek. This is not to say that theology is unimportant – quite the reverse. If we force some kind of top-down, administrative unity without deep theological foundations, it will not last, it cannot last. But foundations are not sufficient, no matter how rock-solid they may be. In many countries, we see how people tend to build their houses as the money comes in, so you have a foundation, and then a wall or two, and then after about ten years you’ve got enough money to put a roof on top – what I mean is, we need to be aware that we’ve done a lot of foundation work, but we cannot only invest in that. At some point we have to start putting up the walls.

AH: And that’s going to require not only leaders of communities, not only ecclesiastical hierarchies, but also large numbers of people who are habituated in the way that you’re describing. There are people in our communities who are quietly building forms of reconciled life every day, and their labor, their vitality, must not be ignored.

JW: That’s exactly right.

AH: In this respect, I think we can take heart that creative ecumenical praxis – once we recognize that it has the potential to reverberate on a deeper psychospiritual level than that of our various efforts to reconcile our ideas and our actions, crucially important though these efforts continue to be – has not exhausted its potential to transform lives, to heal relationships, and to build peace in our time. Thank you for all you are doing on this wavelength, for your global leadership, and for taking the time today to speak with *Ecumenical Trends*. 

Notes:

1. See Susan Durber, “A New Theme for the World Council of Churches: Towards a Heartfelt Ecumenism,” in *Ecumenical Trends* 51.1 (2022), 14-17.
2. See the Church of England’s Living in Love and Faith Resources page, at <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith> (accessed 4 November 2022).
3. See the Difference Course homepage, at <https://difference.rln.global> (accessed 4 November 2022).

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