

LEADER'S GUIDE

Pilgrimage to Busan

An Ecumenical Journey into World Christianity



**God of life,
lead us to
justice and peace**

**World Council of Churches
10th Assembly**
30 October to 8 November 2013
Busan, Republic of Korea

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PILGRIMAGE TO BUSAN

An Ecumenical Journey into World Christianity

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus commanded his followers to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Today the good news of Jesus Christ has found its way to every continent and island, and believers in each place participate in ministries of truth-telling, community building, service to others, dialogue with neighbours, and commitment to the establishment of a just peace throughout the world.

The purpose of this resource is to invite people in congregations to discover at the local level a deeper and more expansive sense of what it means to be a part of the global church — the body of Christ interconnected throughout the world in diverse contexts. The New Testament speaks of God’s reign over the *oikoumene*, a Greek word meaning “the whole inhabited earth.” This term is the origin of the English words “ecumenism” and “ecumenical,” having to do with the quest for unity among all Christians and their churches.

In modern times, the “ecumenical vision” has become one of restoring unity through dialogue and closer cooperation. As groups engage in the journey of understanding described in the following pages, they join in grassroots experiences of, and participation in, the ecumenical movement as a worldwide renewal movement that reframes Christian discipleship to meet today’s most pressing needs.

One of the instruments of the ecumenical movement of our time is the World Council of Churches (WCC), founded in 1948. The 10th Assembly of the WCC is to be held 30 October to 8 November 2013 at Busan, Korea, and this event has provided the occasion for developing this resource. (For a video overview of past WCC assemblies, see <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/videos/wcc-general/an-overview-of-the-9-assemblies-of-the-wcc.html>) Rather than focus on the processes and programmes of the WCC itself, the intent of this study guide is to encourage local congregations to appreciate better some of the spiritual impulses and current emphases of the ecumenical movement and thereby to accompany the churches’ journey to Busan.

Central in all of this are transformational dynamics, consistent with a transforming faith empowered through the work of the Holy Spirit — in our lives, in our churches and throughout the rest of the world and creation. What ecumenism here entails is this ongoing, multifaceted transformation — a life-altering change in how we

understand the Christian faith, ourselves, and our contexts, in how we are related to others, and in our conception of what it means to live this out in the world.

This change occurs through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, but we realize it in community, not just with those who are like us but more significantly through those who seem most unlike us.

The diverse people present at the first Pentecost “were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:12).

The miracle is that the church in all its diversity is one: it is evangelical in its passion for the gospel, ecumenical in scope and outreach, missional for the sake of the whole world, living and working alongside those of many different faiths, seeking justice, peace and abundant life for all of creation, and sustained in discipleship through a spirituality that is both personally and socially transformative. These different aspects of what the church is called to be about, as discussed in this resource, are not separate but overlapping.

What we glimpse is a dynamic, renewed sense of what it means to be the church and to share in God’s mission in this world. This occurs in the world, not apart from it, in ecumenical space with those whose life experiences and sense of church may be quite different from ours, in interfaith space with those who are grounded in faiths different from ours, in worldly space that may not be explicitly religious. Here we confront challenges that run counter to God’s life, justice and peace for all, and that provoke us to address them in a manner consistent with our calling as disciples of the loving God we know in Jesus Christ.

Theologians through the ages have recognized in the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit a pattern for the discovery of unity despite diversity. The three persons of the Godhead are truly One, yet each remains distinct and unique. The three are united in the eternal bond of love.

God’s triune community is composed of interconnected, relational “persons” in community. Grounded in this Triune God, the church is called to be thoroughly relational. We realize that rather than seeking to be self-sufficient churches, we are interrelated. Instead of boasting of our strength or know-how, we acknowledge our own vulnerability. Instead of an urge to tell or show others how to be Christians, we become more open to listen and learn from others.

Through the power of the Spirit, and as we see and con-

nect with those most different from ourselves, we are transformed. Christ chooses our neighbours for us — including those who are quite unlike us, socially, ethnically, where and how they live — and he connects us to them in a communion that transcends time and space and every other boundary.

The “stations” on the pilgrimage to Busan

The six units of this resource — or “station” stopovers along our journey — are intended as localized points of entry into each discussion focus. We begin this ecumenical pilgrimage “from below.” If ecumenism is only viewed from “on high” (or top down), we may miss the living ways the Spirit is ever transforming us into a new missional, justice-seeking, praying people, set free to be disciples of the God of life we know in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit. This God impels us to reach out to those different from ourselves, inspires us to cross boundaries, as Jesus of Nazareth continuously was doing.

The six stations (units) are segments along a continuous track that together conveys a sense of the interactive body of Christ in the world, en route to Busan. They are not separate units, but sites of solidarity for focusing on what it means to live out the prayer of the assembly theme: “God of life: lead us to justice and peace.”

In following this track, what emerges is a deeper, interconnected sense of what the church ecumenical is like — not by what it is (in a static sense) but by what it faithfully continues doing: bearing witness to the reality-revealing truth (the gospel) it knows, interacting and engaging with ever new people and challenges — not with fear but with hope. This is the church ecumenical. We are filled, renewed, energized, and transformed by this amazing God of life — who in Jesus Christ reveals what true life is: “I am the bread of life” (John 6:3), “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6). We are beckoned toward the justice and peace that are hallmarks of the new order of God that is breaking into our world today.

At each station, at least three aspects are interwoven:

Remembering: Biblical, spiritual, and theological insights and practices ground us as Christians. This remembering of the sources of our faith open us up to new horizons for what it means to be evangelical, ecumenical, and missional, bold pursuers of justice and peace in the world; that is, faithful in the distinct contexts where we live, pray, and serve today. We remember how Scripture testifies to the creating, redeeming, sustaining God of life,

but also how this God of life is acting dynamically in our midst and throughout the world today.

Seeing: Because of this remembering, we are able to see what we might not otherwise observe, to clear our eyes and see what separates us from God and others, to see through the illusions or official scripts of our society, to see what is occurring elsewhere, and to name what is occurring that is contrary to the God of life. As those who have been baptized into a new reality (or reign of God), we begin to see, name, and reflect on the urgency of what is happening in our context and how this is related to what is occurring in other settings in the world.

The Spirit of God, active in and among us, moves us to ask: What is impeding or compromising the church’s witness and mission? Where do injustices, abuse, violence, and hopelessness prevail, and why? How are these interconnected? How are they being transformed by the God of life who continually is creating, redeeming, and transforming all that is, including through our relationships with neighbours of other faiths and with creation itself? How might this empower our solidarity for the sake of the world?

Connecting: This distinctly ecumenical practice is both God-given and our ongoing task. Through baptism, God incorporates us into the church, connecting us with others throughout the world. In Christ they become our brothers and sisters, a holy and diverse people. In and through this living body, through the power of the Spirit, we are transformed. And how we view our realities and possibilities for acting in solidarity is also transformed. What seemed blocked, static, without hope, becomes unblocked, redeemed, forever changed. We are moved from a sense of being powerless to question the realities we encounter, to realize that we are empowered to act with and on behalf of others. We are inspired to pray and pursue justice, peace, and the flourishing of all creation. This is at the heart of the God of life to whom we bear witness. Through praying, serving, advocating, and being fully with one another, we live out more fully what it means to be the church in the world.

“Connecting” becomes a metaphor for what ecumenism is about, and for what the ecumenical journey to Busan involves. We realize that as a local faith community — through the sinews of Christ’s body the church — we are connected with our fellow believers throughout the global church. “Their” problems become “our” problems — we both bear them and we bear witness to how they affect us. This mutual solidarity is what enables us to see and act differently, within new horizons of faithfulness. We perceive more fully what it means to be the One Holy

Catholic Apostolic and Church — the whole Church throughout time and space — through which God’s transformation continues to occur, across our multiple contexts. We cannot help but accompany one another, through our prayers, liturgy, service, and advocacy.

Thus, church becomes a “place” of remembering, seeing, and connecting, of putting together what is fragmentary, pointing to what is true, enabling us to see and to act, in the company of one another. This involves the long-term challenge of nurturing and organizing communities of resistance against the dominant expectations and the injustices they entail — as the New Testament church engaged the empires of its day. Similarly, the contemporary church is called to be intentionally collaborative across self-interested boundaries of geography, politics, and religion, to be counter-cultural and trans-contextual.

Using this resource

This resource could be used in an ongoing study group or forum of adults and/or youth. Or consider convening a diverse group from your congregation to a special discussion series with a focus on world Christianity, or with other churches of different affiliations in your community. Consider blogging with those in another part of the world who are also focusing on the global dimension of faith. Seek out those of a different culture or ethnic background to participate in and enrich these discussions.

This guide might be used for a series of weekly or monthly sessions, or as an all-day retreat format. This is a spiritual journey, or pilgrimage, undergirded, framed, and inspired by prayer and song. Prayers and music can be means for engendering resistance when they tell the truth of what is wrong or unjust, and conveying the truth of the abundant living for all that God intends.

You may wish to supplement this resource with related prayers, hymns and music from your congregation’s resources. “We are baptized into a life of interconnected solidarity with others, and nourished through the Meal that sustains us for the journey to God’s justice and peace” (Deborah Ludolph).

The participant guides begin with a description of issues that Christians face in a particular part of the world, and these paragraphs may inspire group members to discover more through research on the Internet or in libraries.

For each station, there is a page of proposed questions for discussion, along with some brief perspectives, to stimulate reflection and discussion as to how this theme relates to participants’ own local situation. This is at the heart

of what should be contemplated at each station. This in turn may be linked with how this is understood or lived out elsewhere, and through the power of the Spirit, such interaction can become transformative, opening us up to remembering, seeing, and connecting in new ways. Makes sure each participant has a copy of the page under discussion.

This longer piece provides some overall perspectives for approaching each station theme and its challenges today. Perspectives from this section could be shared orally with the participants, or else duplicated for them. Additional Web links may enrich what the leader brings to the group, as background for reflecting on the questions. Many of the examples are from events or documents related to the WCC and other ecumenical work, and can help connect issues and experiences identified in your context with what is happening elsewhere.

Together these become part of the journey toward the WCC assembly at Busan. Through this process, those in local congregations are invited to “accompany” participants who will actually be journeying to Busan. In accompanying them, we are continually building and deepening relationships, walking together in interdependent mutuality with others. “Accompanying” is itself a missional movement. In walking together, gifts, resources, and experiences are shared so as to deepen and expand our work within God’s mission.

Give attention to ideas emerging from your reflections and discussion that could be pursued locally. From what you have identified through your discussion, what might be passed along to someone who actually will be at Busan? Go to www.wcc2013.info. The proceedings there will be enriched by an awareness of these local perspectives and examples.

“There is a word of God for our world. It is that the world is in the hands of the living God, whose will for it is wholly good; that in Christ Jesus, his incarnate Word, who lived and died and rose from the dead, God has broken the power of evil once for all, and opened for everyone the gate into freedom and joy in the Holy Spirit; that the final judgment on all human history and on every human deed is the judgment of the merciful Christ; and that the end of history will be the triumph of his kingdom, where alone we shall understand how much God has loved the world. This is God’s unchanging word to the world.” (From the Message of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Amsterdam 1948)

STATION 1

Christian Unity

FOCUS:

The central call to Christian unity, and how this has been pursued in recent years

How to move beyond some of the typical obstacles to greater Christian unity

How Christians are coming closer together, and how this affects their own identity and sense of what it means to be church

The call to be one

“Each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church. It is wholly Church, but not the whole Church. Thus, the local church should not be seen in isolation from but in dynamic relation with other local churches” (*The Church: Towards a Common Vision, Faith and Order Commission*, WCC, 2012; hereafter, “*Church 2012*”).

The oneness of the church of Jesus Christ, as the body of Christ, is already given. It is grounded in and reflects of the unity of the Triune God. Why then are there so many different churches? Why can't we all just be one?

That was the challenge facing the WCC when it was founded in 1948, as a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ. It seeks to advance towards this unity, as Jesus prayed for his followers, “so that the world may believe.” (John 17:21)

But this has been a formable challenge! To begin with, what kind of unity should be sought, and how is it to be expressed?

- as a spiritual fellowship in which we pray for each other? (e.g., through the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle and the Week of Prayer for Christian unity, www.oikoumene.org)
- through agreements on common beliefs and practices? (e.g., the 1982 agreement Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry, download at [http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text.html)

[and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text.html))

- through reconciliation over how we have misunderstood or offended other churches? (e.g., “Healing Memories, Reconciliation in Christ,” http://www.lwf-assembly.org/uploads/media/Report_Lutheran-Mennonite_Study_Commission.pdf)
- in a common church structure, or uniting churches, in which denominational distinctions may eventually disappear? (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/handbook/church-families/united-and-uniting-churches.html> list of united churches globally)

In some places united churches have been formed, to express the fullness of Christ's body in a country or locale. Bilateral dialogues between churches or traditions have also resulted in “full communion” and “unity in reconciled diversity” agreements, in which distinctive confessional identities remain but lose their divisive character. In “conciliatory fellowships” separate churches, respecting others' distinctive traditions, periodically come together through meetings of representatives for common prayer, decisions, and actions — as will occur when churches assemble in the autumn of 2013 in Busan, South Korea.

The WCC brings together 349 churches, denominations, and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 560 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American, today most member churches are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Pacific.

After some decades of work, a significant convergence, as expressed in “The Church: Toward a Common Vision,” is to be considered by the 10th assembly of the WCC:

The unity of the body of Christ consists in the gift of koinonia or communion that God graciously bestows upon us human beings. There is a growing consensus that koinonia, as communion with the Holy Trinity, is manifested in three interrelated ways: unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service (in all its forms, including ministry and mission). The liturgy, especially

the celebration of the eucharist, serves as a dynamic paradigm for what such koinonia looks like in the present age. In the liturgy, the people of God experience communion with God and fellowship with Christians of all times and places.... Strengthened and nourished by the liturgy, the Church must continue the life-giving mission of Christ in prophetic and compassionate ministry to the world and in struggle against every form of injustice and oppression, mistrust and conflict, created by human beings. (Church, 2012, #67)

Since the mid-20th century, the ecumenical movement has helped churches enter into significantly changed relationships with each other, to reach agreements and convergences in basic issues of faith and order, and to develop forms of solidarity, cooperation, and common witness. This has occurred especially through the WCC, but in recent years, also in cooperation with the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and with various Pentecostal, evangelical and independent churches that are not members of the WCC but who have gathered as the Global Christian Forum. Significant advances in the search for Christian unity, often with the participation of churches who are not WCC members, have also occurred on regional, national, and local levels.

Some reminders for getting beyond obstacles to Christian unity

- It often is difficult to move beyond ways of believing and being church that reflect our ethnic or cultural heritage, or other different contextual realities, more so than the catholicity of the faith we share.
- Unity is spiritually based and empowered but also needs to be expressed in visible ways.
- Unity is not uniformity, but appreciates how diversity is rooted in various historical, social and cultural realities, as well as in different theologies and practices.
- Being the church as the body of Christ with many members (1 Cor 12:2) necessarily involves being with those who are different from "us."
- In dialoguing with Christians who are different from us, we begin to see what we would not otherwise, and how our respective perspectives and emphases can complement and together contribute to the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.
- In the end, unity may be furthered more through

common life and action in society than through theological dialogue.

- Unity is not for its own sake but for the sake of God's mission to bring salvation, healing, renewal to the whole world, to be explored as we visit the next stations of this study.

STATION 2

Called to Witness

FOCUS:

To understand some current theological emphases in mission and evangelism globally

To consider some implications of these perspectives for congregations

Mission and evangelism are at the heart of what the church is called to be about. The church exists and is renewed through mission and evangelism. Mission moves the church into a wider understanding of unity — unity with those who are poor, excluded, marginalized, and with the cosmic unity of the whole of God’s creation (see Rom. 8:18ff, Col. 1:20).

For some years, mission organizations and those focused on church unity remained separate, but increasingly these are coming together, both structurally and in terms of complementary emphases. This may be seen especially in the recent ecumenical mission affirmation, “Together towards life: mission and evangelism in changing landscapes” (Commission for World Mission and Evangelism/WCC, 2012; hereafter: “*Mission 2012*”), and from which much of the following is excerpted.

Without mission, no church

The same Spirit of Christ who is the life of the church also empowers the church in mission with a “breath of fire” (Acts 2:3ff). The theologian Emil Brunner wrote that the church exists by mission just as fire exists by burning. If it does not engage in mission, it ceases to be the church. It is not the church that has a mission but rather the mission that has a church.

Mission is rooted in who God is

Mission begins in the heart of the Triune God: the love which binds together the Holy Trinity overflows to all humanity and creation. God’s overflowing love is the source of all mission and evangelism. Mission is a response to God’s love revealed in creation and redemption. The missionary God who sent the Son to the world calls all God’s people (John 20:21), and empowers them to be a community of hope.

Mission is empowered through God’s Spirit and seeks fullness of life for all creation

In inviting us into the life-giving mission of the Triune God, God empowers us to bear witness to the vision of abundant life for all in the new heaven and earth. We are not saved from the earth, but we participate in the world’s healing through the Spirit. Creation, the life of the Spirit, and participating in mission, when woven together, are mutually transformative. The Spirit leads us into places of encounter and critical locations of human struggle where mission occurs. The church is commissioned to celebrate life, and through the power of the Spirit to resist and transform all life-destroying forces.

The first generation of Christians attempted to share the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection. They also drew upon and transformed the cultural heritage of their listeners, thus serving as a leaven to foster the well-being of the society in which they lived.

God’s mission involves not only redemption of the world but also its restoration and transformation. Therefore Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth, the light and leaven of the world” and called people to ferment change, witnessing to the transforming power of God through their lives and actions (Matt. 5:13; 14; 13:33).

Where mission activity is coming from, and its focus, have changed significantly

The majority of Christians today either live, or have their origins in, the global South and East. Rather than mission being initiated primarily from Europe or North America, as was the case a century ago, the zeal for mission increasingly is coming from Christians in these parts of the world. The active agents of mission typically are those who are at the margins rather than the centres of power.

“Historically, mission from the centre was motivated by an attitude of paternalism and a superiority complex, which often equated Christianity with, or subsumes it under, Western civilization and resulted in adverse consequences, including the denial of the full personhood for the victims of such marginalization.”
(Mission 2012, #45)

Former ways of understanding Christian mission have been inadequate insofar as they have failed to recognize that mission derives from an understanding of God as

aligned with those consistently pushed to the margins. Jesus identified himself with the marginalized and excluded people not only out of compassion but because their lives testified to the sinfulness of the systems and structures.

Under the reign of God, inclusion rather than exclusion is the goal of mission. Inclusivity fosters just relationships in the community of humanity and creation, with mutual acknowledgment of persons and creation, and mutual respect and sustenance of the sacred worth of each person. It also facilitates their full participation in the life of the community.

Gospel and culture

Regretfully, mission activity linked with colonization and empire has often denigrated cultures and failed to recognize and draw from the wisdom of local people. By attacking and contributing to the destruction of people's cultures, such mission activity has brought death rather than life.

Cultures and structures that generate and sustain massive poverty, discrimination and dehumanization, exploiting and destroying people and the earth, must be challenged. "Churches cannot claim any authenticity for missional efforts if these yearnings do not shape their efforts" (*Mission 2012*, #42).

Mission includes challenging patriarchal and racist ideologies; it means naming the demon of caste and other systems of exclusion, challenging how these are socially embedded and advocating for the liberation of its victims. It involves acknowledging the right to self-determination of Indigenous peoples, freedom of cultural expression, a creation-centred spirituality and restitution for losses endured through the sin of imperialism.

Evangelism as distinct from proselytism

Evangelism is sharing the good news of the incarnation, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a confident but humble sharing of our faith and convictions with other people, and inviting them to discipleship. Although evangelism is something we do, bringing about conversion and new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit, and it cannot be forced as it is in proselytizing. Authentic evangelism is grounded in humility and respect for all and flourishes in the context of dialogue. The message of the gospel, of healing and reconciliation, is promoted through both word and deed. Evangelism is also a prophetic vocation which involves speaking truth to power in hope and in love (Acts 26:25; Col. 1:5; Eph. 4:15), for

the purpose of furthering the fullness of life (John 10:10) that is at the heart of God's mission.

STATION THREE

Living with People of Other Faiths

FOCUS:

Living with people of other faiths in pursuing life, justice, and peace

Dialoguing to build trust and understanding of each other's core beliefs and values

Appreciating how this can deepen our own identity and Christian self-understanding

Bearing faithful witness in ways that respectfully invite others to share in the good news of the gospel

A few years ago, interfaith relations might have been considered an appendix or afterthought to what the ecumenical movement historically has been about, namely, Christian churches coming together and acting for the sake of God's mission in the world. Today, however, how we relate to and engage with people of other faiths — such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, various spiritualist movements, and other indigenous and localized religions — cannot be postponed until we put our own Christian house in order or complete our ecumenical agenda. The presence of people of other faiths among us poses new challenges as to how we pursue church unity and mission. Further, for much that is urgent on the current ecumenical agenda — especially the pursuits of justice and peace (see stations 4 and 5) — interfaith understandings and collaboration are essential.

Remember

“[Jesus said] there are many who will come from east and west and sit down to eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11).

“Where any religion is instrumentalized for political ends, or where religious persecution occurs, Christians are called to engage in a prophetic witness denouncing such actions” (*Mission 2012*).

“If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace... Thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake.

(2007 open letter from Muslims, <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=option1>).

Living with people of other faiths

In local settings, it is obvious that we must develop constructive ways of living together in daily life. “Diapraxis,” dialogue as action, begins where people are. We cannot avoid difficult challenges to co-existence, suspicions, even tensions and conflict. We must try to live together on the basis of what we share in common.

In the aftermath of massive disasters, Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance) in partnership with other organizations carries out significant relief work in areas where other faiths predominate, whose adherents work with and also on behalf of these organizations. This occurred after the 2004 tsunami devastated the Aceh area of Indonesia, an area of very strong historic Islamic identity. “The tsunami not only destroyed lives and property, but also broke down walls separating the different religions. While the tsunami raged violently, people seeking shelter did not stop to ask about one another's religion” (Jamilin Sirait). Prior to this, there had been no Muslim-Christian cooperation in the area of Aceh.

Such work together cannot avoid facing what are often difficult histories that have kept those of other faiths separated. For example, Aceh had fought to remain free of control by the Dutch, as well as by the central government, because of their desire to be an Islamic state. Attempts in the past to proselytize those of a different faith, along with colonialism, often have led to suspicion now as to the ulterior motive for helping people: “is it to convert them?” Various political, ethnic and ideological differences associated with one religion or the other can compound tensions. The relative size and effective power of each religion in a region or country also are factors.

Collaborating and working together to address needs, pursue justice, and seek peace — even in the face of the most tense and divisive kinds of circumstances — is increasingly crucial. For example, a Muslim imam and an evangelical Christian pastor, who previously were violent enemies of each other, travelled throughout Nigeria to speak and conduct workshops to build understanding and peace (see the video, “The Imam and the Pastor” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCK3wnGnDZY>). Leaders of different faith communities, through Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA, <http://ifapa-africa.org>), regularly go together to areas of conflict on that continent to negotiate peace between warring factions. Furthermore, women often take the lead in encouraging interfaith dialogue in local settings (<http://>

www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/women-bonding-through-int.html).

Interfaith dialogue

Christian faith sets us free to be open to the faiths of others, to risk, to trust, and to be vulnerable. In dialogue, conviction and openness are held in balance. Dialogue is a style of living in relationship with neighbours. This does not replace or limit our Christian obligation to witness, because people bring their respective faith commitments into such dialogues (United Church of Australia: www.assembly.uca.org.au/rof/interfaith-dialogue).

Some principles for entering into dialogue with those who follow a different faith include:

- Whenever possible, plan and convene such a dialogue jointly.
- Each participant should have a sincere desire to gain a deeper appreciation of the religion of the other, attempting to see matters from their perspective.
- Each should be willing to be self-critical of his/her own tradition.
- Be aware of the diversity within any religion, and remember those who are not represented.
- Be alert to insights or commonalities that may emerge in the midst of the dialogue.
- View dialogue not as an end in itself, but for sake of a wider purpose.

(Shanta Premawardhana)

In a 2010 Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Thailand, focused on structural greed in today's global economy, Buddhists pointed out that greed is one of the three poisons (along with hatred and delusion), causing suffering and blocking enlightenment, whereas Christians pointed to the structures of domination and greed that are traditionally related to the power of sin. They together identified common and complementary strategies for addressing greed. Noted one of the participants, "we were forming an interreligious church/*sangha* ... called together by the suffering we see and feel all around us" (Paul Knitter).

Christian self-understandings

Some are reluctant to enter into dialogue with those of another faith because they fear this might threaten their

own faith, especially if they feel unsure or vulnerable about their own religious identity and understandings. Yet the results are often quite the opposite. Through such encounters, we can be converted from a narrow view of how God is active, as seen through our own faith perspective, to a larger vision of how God is active in and through people who hold other faiths.

For example, Muslims upset by cartoons of their prophet published in Denmark were much surer of what they believed than were nominally Christian Danes, who were compelled to reflect anew on Christian beliefs. How might dialogue affect people in each tradition?

"Rather than making us more vulnerable, openness, dialogue, and interaction with people of other faiths test the credibility and relevance of our identity, and help build community" (Aram I). We move from fearful isolation and estrangement, from defensively putting up walls, from setting ourselves over and against others — to participating with others in constructive interaction. In the process of dialogue, how we view one another and our own faith understandings may actually be transformed, sometimes in unexpected ways.

The interconnection of faith, hope and love "is a hallmark for 'good' relations between people of different faiths": faith is the relationship to God that enables and sustains life, hope opens up a new horizon of reconciled relationships, love means developing and sustaining empowering relationships with others. Together "faith, hope, and love open up a space for being with the other" through interfaith dialogue (Simone Sinn).

Bearing witness

Evangelism and dialogue are distinct but interrelated. Authentic evangelism takes place in the context of the dialogue of life and action, with an attitude of respect and friendship. It also involves listening to others, and being challenged and enriched by others (Acts 10).

"Bearing witness" is an invitation to remember and meditate, reminding ourselves of what we believe, and reflecting more deeply on our faith. "To bear" also implies taking the other upon ourselves. In this sense, bearing witness includes receiving the witness of another in a mutual exchange of witness, with an attitude of trust and hope in God alone, not in the rightness of our religious beliefs or practices.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news in all ages and places and should be proclaimed in a spirit of love and humility. If we claim to love God and to love our fellow

human beings but fail to share the good news with them urgently and consistently, we deceive ourselves as to the integrity of our love for either God or people (*Mission 2012*). Sharing the joyful news of the truth revealed in the New Testament and inviting others to the fullness of life in Christ is an expression of respectful love.

Representatives of different religions, conferring together in 2006 on the challenge of conversion, affirmed that “while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating others’ rights and religious sensibilities.... All should heal themselves from the obsession of converting others. Freedom of religion enjoins upon all of us the equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming superiority of our faith” (<http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/report-from-inter-religious-consultation-on-conversion.html>). While it is the responsibility of Christians to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47).

“The cross is not for crusades but a sign of God’s love embracing everybody.” (Olav Fyske Tveit)

In May 2012 a Christian/Muslim team investigating the ongoing strife in Nigeria reported, “From what we have witnessed, it seems that the primary causes of the current tension and conflict in Nigeria are not inherently based in religion but rather, rooted in a complex matrix of political, social, ethnic, economic, and legal problems, among which the issue of justice — or the lack of it — looms large as a common factor” (Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad).

Therefore, we proceed to the next station’s focus: “Working for God’s Justice.”

STATION FOUR

Working For God’s Justice

FOCUS:

To remember how central justice is in Scripture and in the mission of the church

To see how disproportionate wealth accumulation contributes to human impoverishment and ecological devastation

To make connections between these injustices, and realize how the Spirit empowers us to act

“What kind of missional action can the church take in the midst of economic and ecological injustice and crisis on a global scale?” (*Mission 2012*)

Remembering the biblical vision and mandate

The biblical witness is clear: God regularly opposes practices and systems that are unjust, especially in their effect on the poorest. As the prophet Jeremiah declares, “From the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain.... They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying ‘Peace, peace,’ where there is not peace” (Jer 6:13). This vividly contrasts with what God desires: “let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). And how will God bring this about? “I have put my spirit upon [my servant who] will bring forth justice to the nations” (Is. 42:1). Indeed, working for justice is central to what a missional church is called to be about.

In this spirit, the ecumenical church has long spoken out against injustice of various kinds, such as through the recent WCC focus on “poverty, wealth, and ecology” (hereafter, *PWE 2012*) (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/browse/3/article/1634/wcc-forum-focuses-on-pove.html>).

Seeing the realities of economic and environmental injustice today

People don’t need to be told that much in their country and world is unjust. They know it already through what they experience and see.

The first calling of the church is to open up ways for people to name, lament, and rage about the contradictions between what they hope for — a better life for themselves and the rest of creation — and what they are actually experiencing: in many cases, things are getting worse. The overwhelming majority are not benefitting from financial gains, but are increasingly becoming invisible, overlooked, forgotten, not remembered. They yearn for more than sympathy or handouts, and instead for solidarity that can lead to transformation of the assumptions, systems, and policies — or the “gods” to which they feel they, their children and their futures have been sacrificed.

When asked what she hopes for, a woman in a rural Cambodia remarked: “Nothing, I am too poor to hope.” Then, listening to the women around her, she went on to say that they at least hoped they could get a latrine in their village.

“People and the Earth are in peril due to the over-consumption of some, growing inequalities as evident in the persistent poverty of many in contrast to the extravagant wealth of a very few, and intertwined global financial, socio-economic, ecological, and climate crises. Life in the global community as we know it today will come to an end if we fail to confront the sins of indifference and greed that lie at the root of these crises.” (*PWE 2012*).

Connecting poverty, wealth, and the earth

Shifting the focus from poverty to wealth

When churches operate from centres of power and relative affluence, the tendency is to focus on poverty as the problem and how it can be relieved (e.g., through charitable programmes) or overcome (e.g., through development policies). But when seen from the perspective of those who are living on the margins and who remain poor, the focus shifts from poverty to wealth as the problem, especially how pursuing unrestrained accumulation of wealth exasperates systemic poverty and the destruction of creation — the land, air, and water — that sustains all life.

Many efforts have been made to determine an economic line below which people are considered poor, but seldom to establish a line above which people are considered excessively wealthy (view “The Cup of Justice” video at <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/eco-justice/poverty-wealth-and-ecology.html>). Yet wealth itself is seen

as a significant spiritual and ethical problem throughout Scripture, including by Jesus who said: “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt 6:24).

Making connections between economic and environmental justice

A recent WCC call to action discerns “the fatal intertwining of the global financial, socio-economic, climate, and ecological crises.... Far-reaching market liberalization, deregulation, and unrestrained privatization of goods and services are exploiting the whole Creation and dismantling social programs and services and opening up economies across borders to seemingly limitless growth of production.... Various aspects of climate, ecological, financial, and debt crises are mutually dependent and reinforce each other.... The global community must recognize the need ... to do justice in the face of unparalleled and catastrophic inequalities in the distribution of wealth.... Greed and injustice, seeking easy profit, unjust privileges, and short-term advantages at the expense of long term and sustainable aims are root causes of the intertwined crises” (“Economy of Life” #10, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/neoliberal-paradigm/agape-call-for-action-2012.html>).

The prevailing economic model is based on an assumption of scarcity — in opposition to the biblical view of enough for all (cf. manna story in Exodus, feeding of the multitude in the Gospels). The overexploitation of natural resources is based on assumptions of endless plentitude — in opposition to the biblical mandate to care for creation (Gen. 1:28f). The interrelated crises we face today have come about because human beings have reversed and thus violated both of these divine mandates.

Instead of a sense that God will provide what we need, what prevails today is a perverse sense that nature will provide according to the dictates of boundless human greed. Greed has led to practices such as deforestation and the extraction and burning of fossil fuels which have brought climate change and other environmental damage to a crisis point. Tragically, the people and lands most dramatically affected usually are much less at fault than are wider forces, policies and developments to which the people and lands most vulnerable are held captive, as in the case of the island of Tuvalu (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXxX6FeBh2c>).

The dominant global economic system operating today, and its logic, permeate all features of life, destroying it from the inside as well as from the outside, as it seeps

into the lives of families and local communities, even churches, wreaks havoc upon the natural environment and traditional life-forms and cultures, and spoils the future of the Earth.

One approach for working to change this is by advocating ecumenically for an “olive agenda,” inspired by a pervasive biblical image, that combines the “green agenda” that seeks to sustain the Earth with the “brown agenda” that seeks economic development that benefits those lacking what is needed to sustain life (<http://www.thegreentimes.co.za/stories/business/item/1305-ripening-the-olive>).

Why this is a spiritual problem

Greed has become systemic — built into the reigning reality that is accepted as inevitable, like the bondage of sin expressed in Paul’s writings (e.g., Rom 6). It becomes an absolute, an idol, for which lives, communities, and the rest of creation are sacrificed.

Yet it has life-and-death consequences. For example, the rate of people taking their own lives is soaring in Europe so much that a new term is being used in the media: “Suicide by economic crisis.” Religious words like “cleansing,” “virtue,” and “sacrifice” are commonly used to justify austerity policies.

Today, people are in fear and bondage. They fear what the future will hold, unless dramatic changes are made for the sake of economic and environmental justice. While greed has been prevalent throughout human history, under the current global economic system, the virus of insatiability — of never having enough — has turned into a general epidemic. Money has become a commodity from which ever larger profits are promised and expected. When these promises are betrayed — or when the system collapses — the undergirding idolatry is exposed.

From despair and hopelessness to empowered hope

“Despair may be the defining pathology of our time, robbing the church of missional energy.” (Walter Brueggemann)

Because of how despairing, hopeless, and powerless people feel in the face of these interlinked injustices, it is important to view this as a matter of faith. To go along passively with the injustices as if they were inevitable, or to be overcome with feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness, is to submit to the domination of sin and to deny the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and world.

Instead of remaining captive and passive, we are liberated by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to resist the inner logic of personal and structural greed, and the destruction of lives, communities and the environment to which it too often leads. Living out of this Christian freedom rather than out of fear, we are able to lift the veil from our eyes to see, unblock our ears to hear, and unleash our wills to act. (Much of the above is drawn from “Daily Bread Instead of Greed” p. 65ff, <http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/LWF-Eleventh-Assembly-Report-EN.pdf>, 2010).

Some examples of working to change this

“People of faith, Christian, Muslim, and Indigenous leaders in the Philippines, have given their lives to maintain their connection with and to continue to sustain themselves from the land to which they belong. Churches in South America, Africa, and Asia are conducting audits of external debts and challenging mining and resource-extractive companies to be accountable for human rights violations and environmental damages. Churches in Latin America and Europe are sharing and learning from their differing experiences with globalization and working towards defining common but differentiated responsibilities, building solidarity and strategic alliances. Christians are defining indicators of greed and having intentional dialogues with Buddhists and Muslims from which common ground emerges to fight against greed. Churches in partnership with civil society are exploring new ways for ordering international financial and economic life, for promoting life-giving agriculture, and for building economies of solidarity.” (PWE 2012, #19)

What does this inspire you to work on in your context?

STATION FIVE

Praying for God's Peace

FOCUS:

To realize how praying takes us more deeply into the most troubling situations in the world

To gain a deeper sense of what this solidarity implies in the case of entrenched challenges to peace in the Middle East, especially Israel/Palestine

To be inspired, through faith and solidarity with those suffering from violence, to pursue the vocation of just peacemaking

Remember

They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. (Jer. 6:14)

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matt. 5:44)

For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. (Eph. 2:14)

Praying

Prayer is commonly viewed as removing or detaching ourselves from the world in order to relate to and intimately communicate with God about our most private concerns. But prayer can also be viewed as a means of more deeply "thinking our way into God's world" (Douglas John Hall, *When You Pray* [Valley Forge, Judson, 1987], on which much of what follows is based). It provides us a vantage point for seeing the world with all its conflicts and challenges differently — with hope grounded in God's all-encompassing *shalom* (peace) rather than with the despair that pervades situations where tensions and violence continue to rage.

Through the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle we can journey in prayer through the year remembering each country of the world, and affirming our solidarity with them. (www.ecumenicalprayercycle.org)

The God of life does not condemn the world, but is committed to it being healed, reconciled, saved (John 3:17). After all, God became incarnate in the world in Jesus Christ, who becomes the peace that the world cannot give on its own. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (John 24:27).

Jesus entered deeply into the darkness of the world — into its hell. He became so deeply bound up with its pathos, and fervently longed for its peace. Praying is a means for bringing us more deeply into the world. We are pulled into the ugly places where there are painful, often violent life-and-death struggles that we would rather not see or remember. We cannot just name them and move on, yet as we enter into solidarity with them, we ourselves are transformed. As we enter into deeper relationship with those for whom we are praying, we can no longer ignore but, in a sense, become responsible for them. We are caught up in God's transforming activity for the sake of the world.

Our prayers, music, and preaching are tools of resistance when they tell the truth of injustice and the truth of abundant living for all that God intends. (Deborah Ludolph)

We come to prayer as those who have been freed, saved, or liberated enough from our self-concerns to be able to identify with others, to bring others before God — remembering and making them present. Their hurts and longings become ours. Our lives are comingled with theirs, in a solidarity that cannot ignore what is happening to those who may seem "other" or distant from us. In Latin America and elsewhere, those who were killed by death squads are publically remembered in prayer, and the congregation responds with "*Presente!*" Prayer is a practice of solidarity with others, which in turn leads to responsible discipleship (see the next station).

Praying together shows "the deepest level of solidarity we can show one another as human beings.... This solidarity of sharing the burden for others is a way of expressing the deep meaning of the ecumenical movement and the willingness to carry the burdens of others, to carry the cross together." (Olav Fyske Tveit, 2011)

The Israel/Palestinian struggle

The Praying for Peace Initiative is a movement to pray for peace especially within the household of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar. The shadow side of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism is at the heart of some of the most conflicted places of hatred and violence in our world today. Without peace among the three prophetic faiths there will not be peace among us as nations. Without a recovered sense of relationship within the family of Abraham, hundreds of thousands will continue to be sacrificed in the name of peace. (John Philip Newell)

One of the most entrenched struggles for peace in our day is that of the politically complicated Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Attempts to negotiate a peace agreement between the Israel government and the Palestinians have run into repeated obstacles and failures. At its roots are long and deep connections with this land that is holy to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, and the deep wounds from oppressions that continue to affect both sides profoundly. For Jews this includes centuries of anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust, and for Palestinians who have long lived on this land, current oppression due to Israeli policies, such as building walls and settlements in the land that both groups treasure as their own.

Attempts to arrive at common understandings still are being made, sometimes in tent settings with unlikely partners. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/07/world/middleeast/barefoot-in-a-tent-neighbors-trading-vows-of-mideast-peace.html? r=1>)

In 2009, with a desperate sense of having reached a dead end in their quest for peace with justice, the ever decreasing number of Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land issued “a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering” (“A Moment of Truth” — www.kairopalestine.ps, hereafter “*KP*”). In it, they bear witness to how the separation wall “has turned our villages and towns into prisons,” how Israeli settlements “ravage our land in the name of God” and are an obstacle to any political solution; how they experience daily humiliation at the checkpoints, family members are separated, religious liberty restricted, refugees and prisoners languish, and emigration from this land where they have lived so long continues. “Jerusalem ... has become a city of discrimination and exclusion, a source of struggle rather than peace.”

Yet these Palestinian Christians also are resilient in their hope, grounded in God, who empowers them not to give into the evil in which they and their lives are enmeshed, but to continue to resist “not with death but with respect for life” — through nonviolent means that engage the humanity even of those seen as enemy. “Love puts an end to evil by walking in the ways of justice.” Their message to Israeli Jews is that even though they have fought one another, “we are able to love and live together,” and “we can organize our political life together according to the logic of this love and power.” (*KP*, 5.4.2)

“To our Christian brothers and sisters:...The communion of love says to every believer in spirit and in truth: if my brother [sister] is a prisoner I am a prisoner; if his home is destroyed, my home is destroyed; when my brother [sister] is killed, then I too am killed.” (*KP* 5.2)

They pose a clear challenge to Christians throughout the world: “Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security, and love?” (*KP* 6.1).

Their hope is also sustained through the solidarity of Christians who desire to know the truth and to accompany them in this ongoing struggle (<http://www.eappi.org>), through prayer, exchanges, and ongoing advocacy for peace in the Holy Land.

In a response to Palestinian Christians, Christians in the USA confessed their failure effectively to challenge their government’s policies and the theologies used to undergird oppressive Israeli policies, and called Christians to learn in ways that go beyond stereotypes and partial truths, to participate in nonviolent forms of resistance, and to increase advocacy efforts with their own government. (www.kairosusa.org)

“A Just Peace for Palestine ... means peace and security for Israelis, too,” proclaims a grass roots campaign begun in the United Kingdom. (www.justpeaceforpalestine.org)

God of mercy and compassion,
of grace and reconciliation,
Pour your power upon all your children
in the Middle East.
Let hatred be turned into love, fear to trust,
Despair to hope, oppression to freedom,
occupation to liberation,

That violent encounters may be replaced
by loving embraces,
And peace and justice could be experienced by all.
(Said Ailabouni)

Just peacemaking

The peace that Jesus gives us may necessitate disturbing the “peace” enforced by those in control, in order to further the justice or right relationships that God intends. “People asking for their rights under international law are often portrayed as obstacles to peace, rather than an essential part of the journey towards peace with justice. . . For peace with justice, we must look at the world with eyes that seek the radical peace of Jesus and not just the simple peace that is an absence of conflict” (*Imagine: Peace*, WCC 2008, 21).

In calling us to love our enemies, Jesus was beginning to form into a new community those who previously were considered “enemies” — such as a Samaritan woman and a Jew, a Roman soldier and a Palestinian peasant, those considered unclean and those clean, the stranger and the resident, Jews and Greeks. Jesus was calling them, and us, to resist the powers of age-old divisions and to live differently — in a profoundly new kind of community — rather than according to distinctions and powers that too often result in violence.

The wider scope of just peacemaking means giving attention to violence not only in terms of armed, inter-group conflict and arms control, but also in terms of domestic and sexual violence, all kinds of human rights violations, anti-racism work, gang conflict, promoting processes of truth and reconciliation in transition societies, and conflict resolution in our homes, churches, communities, and workplaces.

A just peace requires just peacemakers and institutions, systems, policies, laws, and rituals that shape people differently — that foster democracy, enforce human rights, promote sustainable development, reduce the arms trade, build international, regional, and local networks, and foster the formation of human beings to become makers of peace and lovers of justice. (See Larry Rasmussen, “In the Face of War” [<http://sojo.net/magazine/2005/01/face-war>], on which some of the above was based, as well as various other initiatives.)

STATION SIX

Transformative Spirituality for Discipleship

FOCUS:

What is transformative spirituality?

How does it empower discipleship in and for the world?

Much attention today is being given to “spirituality,” with different approaches — prayer, meditation and other practices for developing deeper, more meaningful personal relationships with God, the Divine, or the Power transcending all that is.

Increasingly, there is new appreciation for how traditions beyond those that are “Christian” can enrich and expand our sense of this holy mystery. From seeing how the Christian faith is expressed and practiced in other parts of the world, we also realize how intertwined are the cultural and spiritual aspects of life for most of the peoples of the world.

Spirituality gives deepest meaning to our lives and stimulates, motivates and gives dynamism to life’s journey. It energizes life in its fullness and calls for a commitment to resist all forces, powers and systems which deny, destroy, and reduce life. It reveals to us a deepening sense of God who cares about all living things. (*Mission 2012*)

Transformative spirituality

Many types of spirituality can be transformative, especially in intimately personal terms. Here we focus on how, in community with those who are significantly different from ourselves, we experience transformation that empowers us for discipleship, especially with regard to the previous stations’ emphases. The challenges there, especially on a global scale, may seem overwhelming, even hopeless, unless we re-discover our power source as it comes through our interconnections with others — not apart from but in and through community.

“Transformative spirituality enables us to consider the meaning of [our] actions....to comprehend the complexity of [our] motives and the impact they have on the world. It is also the capacity to experience passion for a cause, compassion for others and forgiveness of self. It is a process of becoming, but never as an achievement, a potential rather than a possession. Transformative spirituality is finding the truth of our existence and discovering the fire within. It provides us a new understanding of how to be a follower of Christ in today’s context, a new image which may inspire us to be in solidarity with the poor in their struggle for freedom from all forms of unjust systems and structures present in society” (Rico Palazo Ponce, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/transformative-spiritual.html>).

A transformative spirituality re-connects us to others. We are moved to pursue the common good, to stand against all forms of marginalization, to seek the redemption of the whole earth, to resist life-destroying values and inspired to discover innovative alternatives. This spirituality provides the means to discover the grace to be satisfied with enough, while sharing with any who have need (Acts 4:35).

“I am challenged to actively displace and uproot myself so that I may do theology outside of my comfort zone, beyond my limitations, and perhaps even to tread water in the seas in order to gain perspective on the islands.” (JoAnne Chung Yan Lam)

We are empowered to remember, see, connect in ways that we would not otherwise. Space, time, and struggles are opened up to us that would otherwise remain closed. We are “converted” to our global neighbors who may at first seem strange to us. By immersing ourselves in their realities, yet with a transcendent power that cuts across and bridges us, we begin to realize that another world is possible — glimpsed through the vision of what God promises. Together we live into that vision, and on that basis, can work for different priorities and policies in our world today. The Lord’s Prayer petition — that God’s will be done on earth as in heaven — begins to become reality.

Church practices can nurture transformative spirituality

Certain practices have nurtured and sustained the church since New Testament times — such as worship/liturgy, music, preaching, teaching, and practices of welcoming

and serving others. How might they be re-envisioned for their transformational potential?

“In the song of the other we come to understand who and whose we are. As they are ‘re-membered’ into the Body of Christ our journey to wholeness takes on a glimmer of the feast to come. These new voices help us attend to the injustice and perceive our own blindness. When we suffer with our brothers and sisters we become more in tune with the harmony that God desires for creation” (Michael Scott Knarr).

Through proclamation come authoritative words that follow and guide the people called church as they encounter the world. This is done in the context of a specific community that confesses not only its own sinfulness, but also the “fallenness” of the world with its false stories. The gospel is preached and taught but also heard, discussed and lived out by the people of God in the world. Preaching can break the script of the world so as to empower people to become more thoughtful citizens of the whole household of God throughout the world.

“The breaking of the bread during the eucharist is about narrative, memory, solidarity, and resistance. It provides a counter-narrative, an alternative version of history that prioritizes the poor and insignificant and takes them as its reference point. Eucharist is a living presence, a “dangerously liberating memory” that provides us with new perspectives, a subversive memory that “denounces our own complicity in the injustice that holds our world hostage” (Margaret Scott).

Remembering, seeing, and connecting are what the story of faith and the practices of the church are about. They also are how we make sense of our lives and world, and what empowers the church to be and act for the sake of the world.

Church renewed for mission and discipleship

The church bearing witness (which also is a “truth telling”) emerges through remembering who/whose we are in relation to God; what has come before us; and the realities of our neighbors globally as well as locally. This can be subversive — it expresses who or what has been forgotten or overlooked. It can expose our illusions and false gods and the domination, injustices, and violence they perpetuate. It motivates truth-telling and organized action — that is, discipleship for the sake of God’s world.

Thus, the church becomes a gathering for remembering, seeing, and connecting, for putting together what is frag-

mentary, pointing to what is true, enabling us to see and act, including in collaborative actions across boundaries of faith, geography, and self-interest. This is what it means to be an ecumenical church.

God puts us together — in the body of Christ — with those we do not choose. “You did not choose me, but I chose you...to bear fruit” (John 15: 16). Our solidarity is spiritually grounded in Jesus Christ, and inspired by how he related, as do we, with those quite different from ourselves. As we connect with them, a new power emerges. In the space between us, the connective power of the Spirit is alive and active — giving birth to new insights, possibilities, and with transformative power. We are inspirited, empowered through those who have come before us, and those around us now. We can see, hear, and feel them — through their music, culture, and stories. We thus can accompany and join with them in praying, “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.”

Christ asked the disciples to move on, together, not to remain where they were.... This call to costly discipleship and mutual accountability is an ecumenical call. Together with other Christians whose theology, worship traditions, and local contexts may be quite different from our own, we are called to discipleship that has transformative potential. We pray together with confidence and courage...“God of life, lead us to justice and peace.” (Olav Fyske Tveit, 2012)



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