

PARTICIPANT'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

An Invitation to Pilgrimage

Station 1 Christian Unity	Station 2 Called to Witness	Station 3 Living with People of Other Faiths	Station 4 Working for God's Justice	Station 5 Praying for Peace	Station 6 Transformative Spirituality for Discipleship
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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. Though very different from each other, 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.

This resource is an invitation to people in congregations to discover at the local level a deeper sense of what it means to be a part of that 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 solidarity in Christian witness and service. We hope that in your group, your reading and reflection, your explorations, you engage in a journey of understanding described in the following pages. We hope that in your group and your community you can 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), the global fellowship of Christian churches, founded in 1948. The 10th Assembly of the WCC is to be held in the autumn of 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>) But, rather than focus on the processes and programmes of the WCC itself, the resource invites you to engage the deeper spiritual impulses and current emphases of the ecumenical movement and thereby to accompany the churches’ journey 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. They each begin with an encounter with Christians in a different part of the world and with the questions, challenges, themes that they raise for us as Christians in our own communities. We hope that your engagement with these sites of solidarity enables you to live out the assembly theme: “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.”

Christian Unity

STATION STOP

In an eastern European country, the challenges to Christian unity include a strong Orthodox church long rooted in the ethnic and national identity of the people, a Roman Catholic church with strong traditional ties to the Vatican, historic Protestant churches, and a variety of Pentecostal and other recently formed evangelical and independent churches.

Jesus prayed, "I ask ... that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (*John 17: 20-21*). Unity among Christian believers is what God wills; continuing divisions are real wounds to the church as the body of Christ.

1. What are some ways in which the lack of Christian unity is apparent in your community? How are Christians divided from one another? How does this affect their witness to the gospel and their working together in the community?

"We need each other because it is only together that we can grow into the one body of Christ." (*Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the WCC, addressing 2012 meeting of Pentecostals*)

2. How are Christians visibly coming together in your community? How has this changed over the years? What obstacles still remain?

"When we talk about unity, it doesn't mean to change somebody's faith. It means to sit together, to share, to love each other and to accept each other." (*Deaconess Agnes Simbo Lema*)

3. How has getting to know other churches better affected your sense of what it means to be church? How can we be enriched by or learn from our differences?

Christians are called not only to work untiringly to overcome divisions and heresies but also ... to foster legitimate diversities ... in such a way that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole.” (*Church*, 2012, #28,30)

4. How can we risk becoming more vulnerable, open to receiving what the other offers us, different ways of viewing life, the faith, and living out the faith locally and globally?

“We are called to be ecumenical people.... The Holy Spirit isn’t waiting for official ‘OKs’ from church bodies to get their members to worship, learn with, and grow with other churches.... People expect churches to compete with and criticize one another, even to fight. When we work together we show a different understanding of Jesus.” (*Jane Jebsen*)



Called to Witness

STATION STOP

In an area of Latin America that is heavily populated with Indigenous people, the local church yearns to be more active in mission and evangelism with the Indigenous people. The people have had their culture and land taken from them, and have been impoverished through long years of colonialism and imperialism, which they associate with the church. How can God's mission be pursued in this context?

The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. If it does not engage in mission, it ceases to be church.

- 1. Is your church "burning" for mission?**
How, or why not?

Mission is not a project of expanding churches (or numerical growth) but of the church embodying God's salvation in this world.

- 2. How does this notion of mission counter some popular understandings of what mission is about?**

Jesus calls us out of our narrow concerns into a larger vision. The Holy Spirit empowers us to go "to the ends of the earth" as witnesses to God's justice, freedom and peace in each context of time and space.

- 3. How has the Spirit led you into new sites of encounter and struggle, and transformed you, or your congregation, in the process?**

Those on the margins in a society may be able to see what is less obvious to those in centres of power. Through struggles in and for life, the marginalized hold forth what God wants in the world, while also being carriers of the active hope, collective resistance, perseverance and action needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.

4. Who tends to be at the margins in your church and/or community — because of their race/ethnicity, class, age, gender, or other condition? What are their priorities for the well-being of all? How does this affect the mission priorities of your church?

The gospel takes root in different contexts through engagement with specific cultural, political and religious realities. The gospel is liberating and transformative. In its proclamation, cultures may be transformed and more just and inclusive communities created.

5. What aspects of your culture or way of life especially need to be liberated and transformed by the gospel?

Today we live in a world dominated by an excessive assertion of religious identities and persuasions that seem to break and brutalize in the name of God, rather than to heal and nurture.

6. How can we become channels and not obstructions, so that the good news flows like water that heals, restores, and refreshes all?

Living with People of Other Faiths

STATION STOP

In Nigeria, Christians and Muslims have long lived together as neighbours. Yet despite ongoing attempts by both Muslim and Christian leaders to bring peace and reconciliation, there recently have been numerous violent attacks on Christian churches and reprisals against mosques, in the name of religion, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives. This has infected the atmosphere in the country as a whole, filling the people with fear and suspicion — how can Christians and Muslims live together, much less dialogue, in the midst of this difficult situation?

Living with people of different faiths has been the everyday reality for Christians in some parts of the world for centuries, even millennia (as in Asia and the Middle East). However, today this has become an increasingly common reality throughout the world, including in countries considered to be pervasively Christian but where changes and new tensions have arisen in recent years.

1. How are people of other faiths received in your community? What suspicions or obstacles do they experience? Are there ways you have cooperated with people of other faiths on issues or projects in your community? What have you learned from this? On what common concerns might you collaborate in the future?

The ecumenical movement has been addressing this for some decades, in various efforts — to understand the faiths and realities of others, to dialogue with those of different faiths, and to collaborate and work together with them to address human needs and further the common good. Increasingly this is on the ecumenical agenda — for the sake of unity not only with Christians, but with all people.

2. Learning and discussing what those of other faiths actually believe and practice is an essential further step. How have you learned (informally and formally) about other faiths? What has been your experience of actually discussing with persons of other faiths what they believe and practice? How could conditions for such encounters be made more inviting?

Interreligious encounter also has raised new questions and insights into what Christian self-identity means, and for how mission and evangelism should be carried out in our multicultural and interreligious world.

3. How have discussions (or dialogue) with persons from other faith traditions provoked you to think in new ways about how you understand the Christian faith? What questions or insights into your self-understanding as a Christian have these encounters raised? What have you experienced as some of the challenges for bearing witness to your faith among people of other faiths?

Working for God's Justice

STATION STOP

In an area of India where most peasants are deeply impoverished, the land on which their livelihood depends is either subject to severe drought or is being washed into the sea by ever more severe storms related to climate change. Yet they live in a nation with the highest increase in millionaires, many of whom have profited from corporations that have exploited both the people and the land.



One of the deepest and widest streams in the Bible is the call for justice.

1. What biblical passages come to mind when you think of God's intention for justice?
2. What realities of poverty, excessive wealth, and environmental damage do you see in your own community?

Poverty, wealth and the destruction of creation are deeply interconnected and profoundly spiritual problems. Unlimited pursuit of profit and wealth too often occurs at the expense of the poor and of damage to the land, water and air needed to sustain all of life.

3. Discuss examples of how these are connected — in your own as well as other contexts. How could these be addressed together?
4. What are some of the common ways people ignore, rationalize or interpret these crises?

“The Holy Spirit enlivens and equips the Church to play its role in proclaiming and bringing about that general transformation for which all creation groans.” (cf. *Rom. 8:22-23*) (*Church 2012*)

5. Do we believe that the power of the Holy Spirit actually is active in and through us, so that we might play a part in transforming these injustices?

6. Why is it so difficult to work for justice?

7. What are you already doing, or what could you be doing, as a congregation to further God’s justice?

Praying for Peace

STATION STOP

In recent years, the world's yearning for peace has been fervently focused on the Middle East. The "Arab spring" uprisings led to surprising, revolutionary changes in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and have helped inspire the long civil struggle in Syria. Increasing concern is now turning to Iran. The historical legacies, political dynamics, and violent outbreaks have varied significantly. But perhaps none has received as much attention as has the protracted Israel-Palestine struggle.

Prayer takes us more deeply into the world.

1. How does praying bring us into solidarity with others who are suffering and distant from us? Do we really want God to take us there? How might this transform how we see and relate to the conflicts in the world today?

Jesus said, "My peace I give to you" (*John 14:27*). Thomas Merton said that as long as we see other human beings as those to be feared, mistrusted, hated, and destroyed, there can be no peace on earth.

2. How can we distance ourselves from a climate of fear in order to experience the peace that Jesus gives?

In the midst of their suffering and oppression, Palestinian Christians raise up the importance of faith and hope, and advocate nonviolent practices of love toward those oppressing them.

3. How are situations of conflict and violence transformed through the faith, hope, and love we experience through Jesus Christ? How are you involved in advocacy, or could be, especially with regard to Israel/Palestine?

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Transformative Spirituality for Discipleship

STATION STOP

This station is located throughout the ecumenical church, wherever people are connecting with and being transformed through encounters with those different from themselves.

Transformative spirituality is not just about what we do, but about how God transforms us — in community with others — and sends us forth as disciples.

Through the power of the Spirit, as we see and connect with those most different from ourselves, we are transformed. Christ chooses our neighbors for us — including those who are quite unlike us, socially, ethnically, where and how we live — and connects us to them, in a communion or fellowship that transcends time and space and every other boundary.

1. How do you feel connected with Christians from other parts of the world? How might this transform how you understand God, worship, your sense of the church?
2. How has interacting with those from much different contexts enabled you to see “reality” differently, and to become motivated to do something about injustices?
3. How might church practices, such as the music sung, the Word proclaimed, and the sacraments celebrated, form people to challenge injustice, and thus become “subversive” of injustices present in your own and other settings?

Instead of being self-sufficient churches, we are interrelated: instead of our strength or know-how, our vulnerability; instead of an urge to tell or show others, a genuine openness to listen and learn from others.

4. How does this challenge some of the usual assumptions or stances of churches/congregations?

We have been on a journey, touching base with examples of some central emphases characteristic of the ecumenical movement — the “boat, train or plane” — as it travels toward the assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, Korea. But this journey, fueled by the Holy Spirit, is a deeply spiritual movement. It is a movement of transformative spirituality that leads toward discipleship in and for the world.

5. What does that mean or imply for you now? How does the God of life lead us to justice and peace, wherever we are? What implications does this have for our concrete lives and discipleship?

6. What would you like to communicate to those who will be gathering at the 10th Assembly of the WCC in Busan?