

Global church representatives reflect on the path to unity

The World Council of Churches (WCC) 10th Assembly has hosted a plenary session looking at the quest for Christian unity in a global, mixed-belief context. The session invited participants to reflect on a spiritual journey of friendship among the churches, grounded in prayerful reflection.

The plenary included an opportunity for participants to engage with each other to explore the contextual relevance of the ecumenical movement and the shared commitment to the vision “that all may be one, so that the world may believe”, as Jesus prayed in John 17.21 (New Testament).

Moderator of the drafting group on the unity statement, Dame Mary Tanner, from England, introduced the discussion in form and style.

Metropolitan Nifan of Târgoviste, patriarchal exarch for external and ecumenical relationships of the Patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Rev Dr Neville Callam, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, offered reflections on the

CNI
CHURCH
NEWS
IRELAND



“Journey of fellowship: hopes and challenges on the way”.

Alice Fabian, a candidate for ordained ministry with the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa who served as a member of the unity statement drafting group, and Bishop Mark MacDonald shared reflections on the 'Journey of fellowship: God's gift and calling'. The plenary closed with an invitation to recommit to the search for unity in faith. Written prayers for unity collected from assembly participants during the plenary formed part of the closing mid-day prayer and eucharistic service.

The reflection at the plenary included artwork by two Christian visual artists from Asia, the late Sadao Watanabe of Japan and the contemporary Chinese artist He Qi, photographs by Sean Hawkey and music by Korean musicians and the Taizé community.

The Rev Glory Dharmaraj of the United Methodist Church, who participated in the plenary, said the artwork used at the plenary was a powerful visual expression for reflection.

"I was very much touched by the presentation of Metropolitan Nifon of the Orthodox Theological Faculty, especially his appeal. Often we forget in mission that we have to be in

relation both with the visible church and the invisible among us, and in this case the two bishops who were abducted from Syria," said Dharmaraj.

In the plenary, church leaders also made a plea for the release of the abducted Syrian bishops. The Syriac Orthodox and Greek Orthodox archbishops of Aleppo, Yohanna Ibrahim and Paul Yazigi, two prominent Christian bishops who are still missing after their abduction in Aleppo province in April 2013. Their driver, an Orthodox Christian holding the office of deacon, was murdered. The condition of the two archbishops is unknown.

* WCC Unity statement: God's Gift and Call to Unity – and our Commitment <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/unit...>

* Official website of the WCC 10th Assembly: <http://wcc2013.info/en>

WCC Assembly listens to indigenous voices

National Indigenous Anglican Bishop Mark MacDonald has spoken about the "living relationship" that indigenous people have with the land.

He also shared his thoughts about the "sense of kinship" that people feel when they meet with others from around the world.

Jasmine Bostock, also a member of the Episcopal Church's delegation from North America, spoke about how being at the WCC Assembly helps facilitate exchanges of knowledge about indigenous issues worldwide.

A member of the Episcopal Church's delegation from North America, spoke about how being at the WCC Assembly helps facilitate exchanges of knowledge about indigenous issues worldwide.

The Episcopal Church's Sarah Eagle Heart expressed her thoughts about the connectivity of prayer and worship via images shared on social media.

Indigenous Christian voices from around the world – including Asia, India, Africa, Polynesia, Australasia, Aotearoa, the Middle East and North America – have been heard around Busan.

Migrant, gender and environmental justice have also been stressed throughout the Assembly, which has provided the broadest context of global concern for accompanying discussions about Christian unity, the unity of humankind and the mission of the church.

"We crucify God in the global destruction of the Earth. God of life, lead us to environmental justice and peace," tweeted the Rev Sarah Griffith Lund (<http://sarahgriffithlund.com>).

What has marked out this particular WCC assembly has been the variety of forms of participation, both among those hosted in Busan, and among those following and

interacting with the gathering around the world – tens of thousands, it is estimated. *Anglican Journal*, the Anglican Church of Canada's editorially independent newspaper, has been 'storifying' elements of the WCC meeting, from which parts of this report have been sourced

Assembly hears advocates of a just peace in Palestine and Israel

A space set up by the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) at the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea, has been sharing the realities of people living in the Palestinian occupied territory, through images, presentation and conversations stressing the need for just-peace in the region.

need for peace in the region is pertinent to the work of all humanitarian organisations, including UNICEF.

He added that UNICEF's work is purely humanitarian, focusing more on expanding schools, helping to create safe environments for the Palestinian children. Yet, he said, by collaborating with the EAPPI, "We hope to build initiatives that promote reconciliation and peace-building."

Daana appreciates the work of the EAPPI, which he said plays an important role in monitoring human rights violations in the territory, as well as in assisting children in situations where they are faced with threats such as arrests at the hands of Israeli soldiers.

On 4 November 2013, Norwegian Church Aid and the Church of Norway organised a Madang workshop attended by over 100 participants in the assembly. The



In a conversation at the EAPPI space, Adli Daana, Learning for Development officer at UNICEF – a supporting organisation of the EAPPI, spoke about the significance of the WCC assembly theme for the Israel Palestine conflict. The theme is "God of life, lead us to justice and peace". Daana, a Palestinian himself based in the occupied Palestinian territory, said the

workshop showed how the EAPPI has been a useful instrument for "churches seeking just peace" in the Palestine-Israel conflict, through protection and advocacy. Some of the former volunteers of the EAPPI, each of whom spent three months in the West Bank and engaged in advocacy for the protection of human

rights in the occupied territory, shared their experiences at the EAPPI space.

The space also hosted a series of well-attended side events called “Tea Time for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel”, where issues pertaining to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were discussed.

* More information on Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel: <http://www.eappi.org>

Focus of global churches turns to justice and HIV-AIDS

Following reflections from around the world on Christian unity, Asia and mission, the WCC assembly plenary on 6 November in Busan, Republic of Korea, highlighted struggles for justice.

The World Council of Churches' 10th Assembly plenary, moderated by Rev. Dr Angelique Walker-Smith, through its speakers highlighted key issues of justice: justice in the global economic system, holding financial institutions accountable, continuing efforts for human rights and human dignity, empowering the churches

to tackle the concerns of ecology, as well as addressing threats of HIV and AIDS.

Particular groups—women, children, persons with disabilities, HIV-positive people and young adults—were also brought directly into reflections on justice in the plenary.

Martin Khor from Malaysia, executive director of the South Centre, in his comments discussed the São Paulo Statement: International Financial Transformation for the Economy of Life, a document with strong policy recommendations for reforming the global financial system. He held rich countries in North America and Europe responsible for its financial institutions, which he identified as root causes of the current financial crisis, affecting economies of developing countries in many regions of the world. Khor added that following Jesus' example, along with prayer there is a need for concrete actions.

Another speaker, Dr Julia Duchrow from Germany, head of the Human Rights and Peace Desk of Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World), highlighted the WCC's work in the field of human rights, spanning several decades, and particularly noted its programme on combatting racism.



Speaking about multinational corporations and governments, she said these institutions should provide for sustainable development, access to education and health.

Argentinian Bishop Iosif of Patara, from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and general vicar of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and South America, spoke of “love a source of justice.” Making reference to the environment and the sacredness of nature, he stressed the need for steps to renew relationships between the human beings and the creation.

The Rev Phumzile Mabizela from South Africa, executive director of the Interfaith Network of Religious Leaders living with or personally affected by HIV and AIDS (INERELA+), said that HIV-positive people have a “gift of dignity they can share with the churches.” She stressed that HIV is not merely a medical issue but an issue of social justice.

Speaking about gender injustice and the issue of rape, Mabizela challenged the churches to speak out. She called the women “back-bone of the churches” and said that churches have the responsibility to advocate for justice in venues such as the United Nations, amplifying the voices of the poor, who are the real agents of change.

After discussions from the speakers, personal stories of seeking justice were shared.

One of these stories was from Rev. Tafue Lusama, general secretary of the Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu, who spoke on how climate change is affecting his country and how communities are striving for climate justice.

Dr Lukas Andrianos from Madagascar, working for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and based in Greece, highlighted the challenges posed by the economic crisis in Greece. He detailed how the crisis has

churchnewsireland@gmail.com

affected lives of people and urged ecumenical solidarity on the issue.

Shyreen Mvula, a 16-year old Malawian from the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian and an HIV-positive person, spoke about her own struggles for justice. She stressed that HIV is not a curse from God but a disease and should be understood and treated in that way.

* Official website of the WCC 10th Assembly: <http://wcc2013.info/en>

'Safe space' at WCC listens to pain of sexual minorities

A 'safe space' created for dialogue on human sexuality featured stories of pain, exclusion and violence faced by sexual minorities in many parts of the world. This space for dialogue was provided in a workshop on 5 November 2013.

The workshop, which gathered 150 people, was organised by an interchurch organisation for development cooperation, ICCO Kerk in Actie in the Netherlands, and I AM, a South African organisation working from a faith-based perspective for the rights of sexual minorities.

The theme of the workshop was pertinent in addressing the issues of violence and discrimination against sexual minorities, as the WCC assembly is focusing on the prayer, 'God of life, lead us to justice and peace'.

Starting with a prayer from Archbishop Joris Vercammen of the Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands, the workshop invoked stories highlighting the need for constructive conversations on human sexuality despite disagreements that surround the issue within the churches.

Participants in the workshop discussed how faith



communities can be inclusive spheres where sexual minorities can equally share their experiences and contribute towards Christian unity.

Diverse reflections were offered by Dr Elise Kant from the ICCO, Kim Jiun from South Korea, the Rev Dr Benebo Fubara Fubara-Manuel from Nigeria, Florin Buhuceanu from Romania and the Rev Phumzile Mabizela from South Africa. Their presentations led to discussions on widening common ground among church leadership with varied convictions on sexual orientation and biblical interpretation.

By relating the influence and power of faith in human lives, they raised issues of homophobia, transphobia, discrimination, hate crimes and patriarchy by sharing experiences from their local, cultural and personal backgrounds.

The Secretary General

It was also emphasised that the issues of human sexuality are of concern for both the global North and the global South, irrespective of geographical divisions.

The Rev Judith Johanna Kotzé of Inclusive and Affirming Ministries in South Africa,

churchnewsireland@gmail.com

who moderated the workshop, made a reference to the new WCC mission statement, *Together towards life: Mission and evangelism in changing landscapes*.

She said that it is the concept of “mission from the margins” which can inspire an acknowledgement of the pains of sexual minorities.

“As sexual minorities, we live on the margins. If we are engaged and listened to, we can show how much potential is buried behind the exclusion: potential which can contribute to the search for human dignity, justice and peace,” said Kotzé.

The ministers made a reference to a message from Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who has called for “attention on the issue of homophobic violence at the WCC’s 10th Assembly” in Busan

World Council of Churches elects new Central Committee

The World Council of Churches has elected a new Central Committee during its Assembly in South Korea.

The 150-member Central Committee serves as the main decision making body of the Council between Assemblies. Members were elected during a closed session at the Assembly currently taking place in Busan.

Ordained persons make up the largest group in the new Central Committee (68%). Just under a third (32%) are lay and 39 per cent are women.

The nominations committee worked with a pool of names put forward by the WCC's 345 member churches.

A 25-person executive committee, a moderator and two vice-moderators will be elected by the Central Committee later this week.

Further reports from the Assembly will be included in the World News features on CNI