



## Pope visits WCC conference and urges new evangelical outreach



Pope Francis has given a strong message about the ecumenical journey during a visit to the World Council of Churches' headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.



In a homily during a prayer service in the Ecumenical Centre, Pope Francis spoke about the journey towards Christian unity and the pitfalls on the way. “For us as Christians, walking together is not a ploy to strengthen our own positions, but an act of obedience to the Lord and love for our world,” he said. “Let us ask the Father to help us walk together all the more resolutely in the ways of the Spirit.

“I wanted to take part personally in the celebrations marking this anniversary of the World Council, not least to reaffirm the commitment of the Catholic Church to the cause of ecumenism and to encourage cooperation with the member churches and with our ecumenical partners.

“Whenever we say ‘Our Father’, we feel an echo within us of our being sons and daughters, but also of our being brothers and sisters. Prayer is the oxygen of ecumenism.”

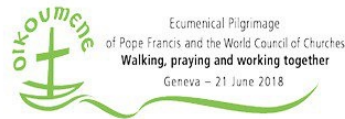


Photo: Albin Hillert



**Walking in the Spirit means rejecting worldliness. It means opting for a mindset of service and growing in forgiveness**

His Holiness Pope Francis



The visit by Pope Francis is the landmark event in a number that have been held to mark the 70th anniversary of the World Council of Churches.

On his arrival in Switzerland, Pope Francis held a brief private meeting with the President of the Swiss Confederation, Alain Berset, at Geneva's international airport before heading to the chapel of the Ecumenical Centre.

The Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, which brings together around 50 million Christians from Anglican, Orthodox, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran and Reformed churches. But the Roman Catholic Church works closely with the WCC and is a member of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission.

“The World Council of Churches was born in service to the ecumenical movement, which itself originated in a powerful summons to mission: for how can Christians proclaim the Gospel if they are divided among themselves?” Pope



Francis said. “The missionary mandate, which is more than diakonia and the promotion of human development, cannot be neglected nor emptied of its content. It determines our very identity.”

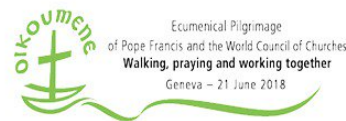
The Anglican Church of Kenya’s Dr Agnes Abuom, moderator of the WCC’s central committee, was present during the ecumenical prayer service, as was the WCC general secretary, the Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, and committee vice-moderators Bishop Mary Ann Swenson from the United Methodist Church in the US, and Metropolitan Gennadios from the Greek Orthodox Church in Italy. They were joined by members of the central committee, one of WCC’s main governing bodies.

Official contacts between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC date from the early 1960s, following the decision



**This day is a symbol of the divine love that is embedded at the heart of our faith. It is a day of blessing to take with us on our pilgrimage of faith**

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC General Secretary



by Pope John XXIII in 1959 to convene the Second Vatican Council.

In his homily, Pope Francis said human beings are constantly on the move, while noting that walking is a discipline needing “patience and exercise, day after day.” He cited the Apostle Paul’s epistle to the Galatians (5:16) saying, “We can either walk in the Spirit along the path opened up by our baptism or else we can ‘gratify the desires of the flesh.’”

“Driven by our instincts, we become slaves to unbridled consumerism, and God’s voice is gradually silenced.

Other people, especially those who cannot walk on their own, like children and the elderly, then become nuisances to be cast aside. Creation then comes to have no other purpose than to supply our needs,” he said, speaking the day after World Refugee Day.

“Ecumenism made us set out in accordance with Christ’s will,” he said, “and it will be able to progress if, following the



**Matildes Colombo, who was recently diagnosed with Leukaemia, presents a drawing to Pope Francis at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva**

lead of the Spirit, it constantly refuses to withdraw into itself.”

Stephen Brown, editor of the WCC’s quarterly journal *The Ecumenical Review*, travelled with the Pope on the plane from Rome’s Fiumicino airport. “About 35 minutes into the 90 minute flight, Pope Francis appeared in the section of the airplane reserved for journalists where he thanked them for their work and their contribution to the success of the visit,” Brown said in [an article for the WCC website](#).

“It’s a journey toward unity, the desire for unity,” the Pope told journalists in Italian, before greeting the journalists individually.

Pope Francis' visit is the third by a Pontiff to the WCC, but the first dedicated to the ecumenical organisation. "When Pope Paul VI visited in 1969 it was part of a trip to Geneva to mark the 50th anniversary of the International Labour Organisation," Brown notes, "and in 1984 Pope John Paul II was undertaking a pastoral visit to Switzerland."

The Vatican correspondent of the French daily *La Croix*, Nicolas Senèze, was also on the Papal aeroplane. He told Brown that the Pope wanted to make a dedicated visit to the WCC. There were, he said, a number of organisations in Geneva the Pope could have visited as well, "but he specifically wanted to dedicate this visit to the World Council of Churches," said Senèze. "It was a personal choice of the pope who clearly wanted to avoid any other issue eclipsing the ecumenical dimension of this day in Geneva."

## **Pope Francis: We are Called to Walk in the Spirit**

### **Address to the World Council of Churches in Geneva**

Pope Francis on June 21, 2018, echoed the words of St. Paul, who called on Christians to "walk in the spirit."

His comments came in an address at the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Center in Geneva, a key moment in his one-day pilgrimage to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the WCC.

"We have heard the words addressed by the Apostle Paul to the Galatians, who were experiencing conflict and division," the Holy Father recalled. "Groups were fighting

and hurling accusations at one another. It is in this context that the Apostle, twice in the space of a few verses, invites us to ‘walk in the Spirit’ (cf. *Gal* 5:16.25).”

Pope Francis that human beings are always on the move: walking. Walking is a discipline that takes effort, requiring patience and exercise.

“The metaphor of walking reveals the real meaning of our life, a life that is not self-sufficient but always in search of something greater,” the Pope said. “Our hearts spur us to keep walking, to pursue a goal.”

He explained that for Christians it isn’t enough to be simply moving, but requires the “unavoidable decision” to “walk in the spirit” as Paul suggested. And this means rejecting worldliness.

“Dear brothers and sisters, today more than ever the words of the Apostle Paul challenge us. Walking in the Spirit means *rejecting worldliness*,” Francis stressed. “It means opting for a mindset of service and growing in forgiveness. It means playing our part in history but in God’s good time, not letting ourselves be caught up in the whirlwind of corruption but advancing calmly on the way whose signpost is the ‘one commandment: You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (v. 14). The path of the Spirit is marked by the milestones that Paul sets forth: ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control’”(v. 22).”

The Pope admitted that this approach might cause the faithful to “operated at a loss” in material terms. But he recalled the world of Christ: “Those who want to save their



life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (Lk 9:24).

“To save only what is ours is to walk according to the flesh; to lose everything in the footsteps of Jesus is to walk in the Spirit. Only in this way does the Lord’s vineyard bear fruit,” the Pope contended. “There is only one way to shore up our wavering footsteps: to walk in the Spirit, purifying our hearts of evil, choosing with holy tenacity the way of the Gospel and rejecting the shortcuts offered by this world.”

## **Pope Francis Cites Three Simple Words: Father, Bread, Forgiveness**

### **Ask Only for What is Truly Needed, Live a Simpler Life**

“Father, bread, forgiveness,” the Pope began. “Three words that the Gospel offers us today. Three words that take us to the very heart of our faith.”

**Father:** The Pope stressed that this is where the central prayer of our faith begins. Before being powerful and infinite, God is father.

**Bread:** In the “Our Father” the Pope notes that we ask for our needs for just that day. This is our call to a simpler life.

**Forgiveness:** The Holy Father reminded the congregation that God never tires of forgiving our sins. For us, forgiveness is not easy – but that is what God expects, that we forgive others as he forgives us.

The Holy Father urged the faithful to never tire of saying “Our Father”. It holds many vital reminders.

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“It will remind us that just as there are no sons or daughters without a Father, so none of us is ever alone in this world,” the Pope said. “It will also remind us that there is no Father without sons or daughters, so none of us is an only child. Each of us must care for our brothers and sisters in the one human family.

“When we say ‘Our Father’, we are saying that every human being is part of us, and that, in the face of all the wrongs that offend our Father, we, as his sons and daughters, are called to react as brothers and sisters. We are called to be good guardians of our family, to overcome all indifference towards our brothers or sisters, towards *any* of our brothers or sisters. This includes the unborn, the older person who can no longer speak, the person we find hard to forgive, the poor and the outcast. This is what the Father asks us, indeed commands us, to do: to love one another from the heart, as sons and daughters in the midst of their brothers and sisters.”

Pope Francis concluded with a reminder that forgiveness “renews and works miracles”:

“Forgiven by our Father, each of us is born again as a new creation when we love our brothers and sisters. Only then do we bring true newness to our world, for there is no greater novelty than forgiveness, which *turns evil into good.*”

**The full text of the Pope’s address to WCC -**

<https://zenit.org/articles/geneva-holy-fathers-address-to-wcc-ecumenical-meeting-full-text/>

**Platform -**

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Reverend Olav Fykse Tveit, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

[http://www.gpplatform.ch/sites/default/files/Olav%20F%20Tveit%20-%20ENG%20new\\_update.pdf](http://www.gpplatform.ch/sites/default/files/Olav%20F%20Tveit%20-%20ENG%20new_update.pdf)



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