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Original

# Report of the Programme Guidelines Committee

## Introduction

1. The mandate of the Programme Guidelines Committee (PGC) is to propose policies for all further programmatic work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and relationship strategies in the areas of churches and ecumenical developments, unity and mission, and public witness and diakonia. In light of this it is then charged to look at possible priorities for future work. The central committee has asked that an integrated and coherent approach to strengthening relations with and between member churches, and more generally in the ecumenical movement, be developed, along with programmatic work which is relevant to the member churches, the ecumenical movement, and the world at large. Therefore, the PGC proposes a vision and strategic direction for the further programmatic work of the WCC. The integrated approach between programmatic and relational work is a new step for the PGC and required that particular consideration was given to questions of methodology.
2. The PGC studied a number of reports prepared by the governing bodies, advisory bodies, and by WCC staff. These were *A Faith That Does Justice: The Journey of the WCC from Porto Alegre to Busan*; *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*; *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*; *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*; *Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All: A Call to Action*; *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace*; *Theological Perspectives on 'Diakonia' in the Twenty-First Century*; *Ecumenical Covenant on Theological Education*; *Pre-Assembly Programme Evaluation* (September 2012); the report of the Core Group of the Programme Committee of the central committee (September 2012); the report of the Programme Committee of the central committee (September 2012); the report of the Programme Sub-Committee of the executive committee (March 2013); and *Towards a WCC Strategy 2014-(2018)-2021* (March 2013). Sub-committees also considered the report of Echos – Commission on Youth in the Ecumenical Movement (2011); report of the Continuation Committee of Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (2012); report of the Inter-Orthodox Pre-Assembly Consultation (2012); and the Indigenous Peoples' Consultation report (2012).
3. In addition, members of the PGC attended Ecumenical Conversations, listening for emerging themes and priorities from delegates. Consideration was also given to contributions during plenaries and hearing sessions. Contributions on specific issues were received from various constituencies including Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI), the Create Safe Space Caucus, young delegates and assembly participants, Indigenous Peoples delegates and assembly participants, and delegates from particular countries. We thank all those who provided input. The reports of the Ecumenical Conversations are attached as an appendix to this report and will be used, along with all other contributions, as a resource in the next stage of discussions regarding programmatic priorities.
4. The PGC also reflected on the outcomes of the women and men's, youth, Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network (EDAN), and Indigenous Peoples pre-assemblies. The PGC appreciated the important work that these pre-assemblies have done, and their results will be important for future

programmatic work. As there is no formal link between pre-assemblies and the assembly itself, the PGC considers it necessary for the work of the pre-assemblies to be formally reported to future assemblies.

5. **Recommendation: The assembly receives with appreciation the report, *A Faith That Does Justice: The Journey of the WCC from Porto Alegre to Busan*.**
6. **Recommendation: The assembly recommends to the central committee that the work of the pre-assemblies be formally reported to future assemblies, and the current pre-assembly outcomes and recommendations be considered for integration into programmatic work.**

## **A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace**

7. The PGC would like to express our particular appreciation to the moderator of the central committee and the general secretary for their reports to the assembly. These have been valuable resources in articulating a broad vision for the WCC as a fellowship of churches in the next period. The general secretary introduced the PGC to the recommendation of the central committee that WCC work in the period until the next assembly be understood as “A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace”.
8. Regardless of our confession or denomination our understanding as Christians is that life is a pilgrimage guided to a promised destination by and with God. A pilgrimage expresses our rootedness in our Christian faith. The theme of a pilgrimage to describe the WCC journey over the next eight years is one which resonated strongly with the PGC. The assembly prays “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”, a prayer which in its essence suggests we journey together.
9. As the people of God were guided by the “pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire” (Exodus 13:21) throughout their pilgrimage, God goes before us ensuring our collective safe passage. We journey towards the same destination as a unified, diverse people of God (Hebrews 13:13), empowered by the prayer of Jesus that we might be one that the world may believe (John 17:21). As fellow pilgrims we travel together, knowing and protective of each other’s vulnerability, offering each other hospitality and graciousness, and listening to each other, willing to take risks as we discern together which new territory to enter. We do this recognising that we must continue to work at our visible unity as fellow Christians. A pilgrimage of justice and peace acknowledges that many in this world are already struggling for justice and peace, and brings the churches together in a journey of solidarity. We move towards a more sustainable life in dignity and fullness where a glimpse of God’s reign gives us hope.
10. The proposal for a pilgrimage of justice and peace was made by the Central Committee (September 2012) “based on the basic parameters found in the Economy of Life document, Commitments and Call, para. 21-26 at the assembly in Busan (until the 11th assembly) for and of the churches to focus on faith commitments to economic justice (poverty and wealth), ecological justice (climate change, etc.), and peace building.” [GEN PRO 10, recommendation 10b]. The central committee also recommended “that the WCC initiates a broad theological study process of the issues related to a *pilgrimage of justice and peace* in order to connect to the theological work on ecclesiology (undertaken by Faith and Order), unity, mission (CWME) and others within the member churches.” [GEN PRO 10, recommendation 10c].
11. A common call throughout this assembly has been to ensure that all WCC work has a strong theological foundation. Substantial work has been done in various study processes such as Edinburgh 2010, the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (Kingston, 2011), *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* (2011), *Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All* (2007-2013), and the mission affirmation, *Together towards Life* (2012). On the basis of these reflections further theological work needs to be done to gain a full understanding of what it means to have a pilgrimage of justice and peace. Furthermore, in understanding the Biblical meaning of pilgrimage, justice, and peace, we reclaim the Christian understanding of these concepts as exemplified by Christ Himself.

12. **Recommendation: The Assembly affirms the decision of the central committee (September 2012) regarding a pilgrimage of justice and peace. [GEN PRO 10, recommendation 10b and 10c]**

### **Walking together as a fellowship**

13. At the 8<sup>th</sup> assembly (Harare, 1998) the need to find a new balance between the WCC as a fellowship of churches and the WCC as an organisation was acknowledged (*Common Understanding and Vision*). Since the 9<sup>th</sup> assembly (Porto Alegre, 2006) the WCC has been in a period of transition because of major financial challenges which necessitated restructuring. Subsequently, there is the likelihood that as an “organisation” we will keep facing the prospect of diminished financial resources. As a “fellowship” however, we have much greater potential, and this is an opportunity to actively reconsider how we want to engage with each other through the WCC.
14. A question that must be asked is, how does viewing ourselves as a fellowship of churches change the WCC's programmatic methodology? Can the WCC continue designing programmes from the Geneva offices, or has the time come that we plan and implement programmatic work more systematically together with the member churches? The PGC believes that our programmatic work has a strong relational dimension, and that relations with our member churches are a condition for effective programmatic work. With respect to the fellowship, the criteria should therefore be that programmes will be run only when they are undertaken in cooperation, at both planning and operational stages, with member churches.
15. At another level, advisory bodies such as commissions and reference groups are important for the work the WCC does as they play a crucial role in connecting the WCC with its member churches. They should therefore be understood as significant participants in a pilgrimage of justice and peace. In light of the need to strengthen the involvement of member churches in the life of the WCC, the role of advisory bodies needs to be reviewed.
16. **Recommendation: The assembly affirms the above understanding of our future methodology in which programmatic work has a strong relational nature, and relational work strengthens the programmatic work.**

### **Sharing the journey**

17. Another part of the WCC's methodology has to do with how we engage our partners, both in terms of other churches and ecumenical partners, and international organisations. Through these relationships we hope to journey together in a pilgrimage of justice and peace. The WCC has an unique position in being able to bring the faith community and the international community together on common issues and convene these partners at a global level.
18. The reports of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC, the Joint Consultative Group between Pentecostals and the WCC, and the Joint Consultative Commission between the WCC and Christian World Communions, were received with appreciation and the PGC consider that their proposed directions be affirmed. It is important to foster dialogue and cooperation, and continuing regular feedback to the governing bodies is essential. A pilgrimage of justice and peace also includes cooperation between the WCC and ecumenical organisations such as national councils of churches, regional ecumenical organisations, mission organisations, and development organisations working together in ACT Alliance.
19. Through the report of the general secretary and a presentation in the thematic plenary, the assembly has heard of the need to continue the WCC's prophetic voice to international organisations, such as the United Nations. We are also being called to be in partnership with these organisations on common

goals and interests. As an example, we affirm that the WCC offices in Geneva and New York are strategically positioned for this interaction.

20. **Recommendation: The assembly receives with appreciation the reports of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC, the Joint Consultative Group between Pentecostals and the WCC, and the Joint Consultative Commission between the WCC and Christian World Communions.**
21. **Recommendation: The assembly asks the central committee to explore methodologies for engaging the wider ecumenical movement and international organisations in a pilgrimage of justice and peace.**

## **Integration of the programmatic work**

22. "A pilgrimage of justice and peace" provides an integrating focus for the fellowship. It requires that there be common perspectives among all major areas of work in order that they enrich each other in creative and innovative ways and are directed towards action. Walking together gives the opportunity for more integration in engaging the fellowship and for more systematic collaboration.
23. The assembly affirms that the WCC structures its programmatic work in three broad areas: unity and mission, public witness and diakonia, and ecumenical formation. It is important that these three areas have a focused approach and avoid addressing too many separate issues.
24. Choices for priorities and specific projects should be made based on the outcomes of the Biblical and theological reflection, and methodological exploration, as described above. A strategic plan should be developed concentrating on areas where the WCC can offer added value to member churches and other organisations. It should be a tool for monitoring and for external evaluation, should show and measure outcomes and impact, and should set clear priorities and establish appropriate lines of accountability to governing bodies, member churches and funding partners.
25. A pilgrimage of justice and peace requires the full participation of under-represented groups such as women, young adults, lay people, persons with disability, and Indigenous Peoples within the programmatic work, and member churches are further encouraged to include these groups in leadership roles.
26. **Recommendation: The assembly recommends that a strategic plan be developed and presented to the Central Committee in July 2014 for approval.**

## **Overview of Programmatic Work**

### *Unity and Mission*

27. Seeking the visible unity of the church, engaging in deep theological discussion of the manner in which we can work together in the world is something which is at the core of the WCC mandate. The document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* is an important step towards understanding what it means to be Church today, and the Commission on Faith and Order is subsequently encouraged to take the lead in collecting responses from the churches and furthering the process of reception. Building on this process, and in the context of pilgrimage, the commission should start reflecting on contextual ecclesologies. In light of responses to the document and insights gained in Ecumenical Conversations, reflection should commence on the renewal of churches in their diverse contexts, fully taking into account the traditions and challenges we currently experience.
28. Being aware of divisive issues among churches, the WCC can function as a safe space to enter into dialogue and moral discernment on matters which the churches find challenging. Examples which

have been heard strongly in this assembly include questions of gender and human sexuality. Controversial issues have their place within that safe space on the common agenda, remembering that tolerance is not enough, but the baseline is love and mutual respect.

29. The new mission affirmation, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, is a significant step forward in the ecumenical understanding of the missional nature and practice of churches. The practical guide accompanying the mission affirmation helps churches to renew their engagement in mission and evangelism. Building on the responses to this document and related documents, and in the context of pilgrimage, the reality of migrant churches, churches in numerical minority situations, and the dialogue and cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostal and evangelical churches needs to be taken up in this process. More work needs to be done on mission and self-understanding in inter-religious and secular contexts.
30. The work of the WCC on inter-religious dialogue and cooperation has resulted in relations of growing trust with other religions, such as Judaism and Islam. This trust is important in fostering justice and peace, especially in areas of conflict. As most churches now live and work in inter-religious contexts, and are in some cases a numerical minority, trust-building becomes an important aspect of a pilgrimage of justice and peace. Doing so it is important to take into account the recommendations in *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*. Dialogue and cooperation with other religions also invites reflection on our own faith. Work on Christian self-understanding in the midst of other religions needs to continue as it helps churches journeying along with others.

### ***Public Witness and Diakonia***

31. In the responsibility and identity of the church in wider society, public witness and diakonia are intertwined and essential. As the WCC embarks on a pilgrimage of justice and peace we affirm the background documents, *Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace: A Call to Action*; *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace*; and *Theological Perspectives on 'Diakonia' in the Twenty-First Century*. The recommendations of these documents should be taken further. On a pilgrimage we are respectful of creation and human dignity, and the provision of basic needs for all. In this Assembly we have particularly heard people lift up issues of economic justice, climate change and eco-justice, and social justice. The programmatic work on these particular issues should be integrated into a holistic model, undergirded by theological reflection.
32. Speaking as a fellowship which has the unique perspective of working at local, national and international levels simultaneously, the WCC has a distinctive advocacy role in the context of a pilgrimage of justice and peace, representing not only general opinions but the real experience of, and commitment to, its members around the world. The WCC has a role of being the prophetic voice of the fellowship of churches to the international community and also speaks to its own constituency.
33. Where the WCC has used special envoys to areas of conflict in the past this has proved to be effective. This methodology should be explored further in areas of current and future conflict, and places we have heard of particularly in the assembly where this might be effective are the Middle East, Pakistan, Nigeria, West Papua, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In areas of inter-religious conflict, working with representatives from other faiths may be important.
34. **Recommendation: The assembly requests the central committee to explore the use of Special Envoys and to implement a comprehensive communications approach that enables the WCC to influence the public debate according to the WCC agenda.**

### ***Ecumenical Formation***

35. The WCC plays a significant role in ecumenical formation and leadership training. Fostering visible unity and strengthening cooperation among churches in the fellowship needs a profound understanding of the ecumenical movement and a spirituality and ability of journeying together. Forming ecumenical leaders remains crucial at a time when training within some churches tend to be more denominationally oriented. Leadership training is required especially in fast growing churches. The

WCC has a long tradition in ecumenical formation and theological education through its Ecumenical Institute (Bossey) and the Ecumenical Theological Education programme. In developing a coherent strategy, existing approaches need to be evaluated, and new ways of working, such as a global ecumenical theological institute (such as GETI), need to be explored. This should include attention to ecumenical formation of lay people and to theological reflection through a variety of contextual lenses.

36. **Recommendation: The Assembly asks the General Secretary to initiate a round-table meeting immediately after this Assembly, inviting representatives of the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI), the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, and key universities/seminaries in the field of Ecumenical Theology, in order to establish a new network for Ecumenical Formation.**

## **Conclusion**

37. Our thoughts are centring on the fellowship of churches which keeps us in committed and caring relationships of love. We give thanks for the gift of a common pilgrimage following the God of life and for the gifts of member churches, that will join each other in a pilgrimage of justice and peace and invite all member churches and ecumenical partners to participate in it, sharing their gifts with each other as we pray “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”.
38. **Recommendation: The assembly invites member churches and ecumenical partners to commit to working together as a fellowship in “A Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace”.**

## **APPROVED**