



METHODIST MISSION AND ECUMENICAL NEWSLETTER - July 2021

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING

With 124 of 155 central committee members and presidents from around the world present, the WCC central committee convened to advance preparations for the 11th WCC Assembly, taking place in 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany under the theme “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.” The central committee also addressed membership matters and strengthened the WCC fellowship through prayer and sharing.

The agenda included the presentation of the assembly programme for approval. The central committee received member church delegations to the assembly, nominated additional delegates and reviewed its report to the assembly – From Busan to Karlsruhe. The central committee received the application for membership of two churches and approved addendums extending the WCC strategic plan and financial strategy to include 2022.

This was the first meeting of the WCC central committee using electronic communications. For some members it was first time to use Zoom and many members were participating in middle of the night their local time.

Dr Abuom: “We are committed to stay and move together”

In an opening address, moderator Dr Agnes Abuom provided a glimpse of how the global church is coping with the impact of COVID-19. “COVID-19 has, with alarming speed, delivered a global economic shock,” said Abuom. “It has had devastating effects on women, the young, the poor, people employed informally, and those working in contact-intensive sectors.”



“Unity is more important than ever,” reflects WCC acting general secretary

In his report, WCC acting general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca reflected on how the WCC adapted the work in the midst of the pandemic and how relevant its work for unity and reconciliation continues to be. “Our unity, as one human family and as a fellowship of churches, is more important than ever,” he said. “We are living through a time of great suffering.”

Churches have lost many members and leaders, lamented Sauca. “The member churches have been incredibly resilient and responsive during the pandemic,” he said. “You are each a part of this transforming discipleship that has kept the church vibrant and alive.” The pandemic continues to affect the entire fellowship, he also noted.

Regional concerns and solidarity

At regional meetings, WCC central committee members gathered to pray together, share their concerns and map a way forward in solidarity. Regions included Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America and the Pacific. Across all regions, representatives shared a wide range of social, political and economic concerns that increased during the COVID-19. Division at the heart of society and a lack of hope were the biggest concerns worldwide.

African representatives focused on how they will share their gifts and strengths during the WCC 11th Assembly. The Asia region discussed how to prepare for assembly in a spirit of collaboration and unity. The Caribbean focused on how resilience shines even amid COVID-19 vaccine inequity. Europe representatives reflected on the transformation of the pandemic of death to a pilgrimage of life and faith. Latin America shared how the pandemic has hit vulnerable communities and increased social challenges. The Middle East reflected on continued holy witness on the road towards the upcoming WCC assembly. North American representatives discussed how borders can become shared spaces even amid racism and other divisions. The Pacific region focused on being pastoral, practical, vigilant and prophetic on the way to the assembly.

The fabric of the WCC 11th Assembly

The central committee received the delegations of over 80 percent of the WCC member churches and took note of the churches that have not yet nominated their delegates. Based on suggestions from the member churches, the central committee nominated an additional 104 delegates to strengthen the participation of women, youth, indigenous peoples, lay people and people with disabilities.

Communicating in the 21st century

The WCC central committee focused on the ways in which the WCC, during the COVID-19 pandemic, has enabled the fellowship to stay together. The committee also looked back at history for lessons learned about communicating during troubled times.

Celebrating the ability to conduct “virtual gatherings” for the global fellowship, the committee also emphasized seeking to address economic and geographic gaps. Recognizing the limits of equitable infrastructure and lack of hardware in certain places in the world prevents and limits engagement in virtual gatherings.

A paper, “New WCC Communications report for the 21st Century,” was proposed that will briefly review the two communications statements that emerged at previous assemblies before focusing on the forthcoming 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, with a draft to come in early 2022. The paper will also include the results of the upcoming symposium on “Communication for Social Justice in a Digital Age.”

HOW CHURCHES CAN HEAD OFF VACCINE HESITANCY

Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton reflects on how churches can head off vaccine hesitancy. Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton is ecumenical officer for the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and presiding bishop of the Fifth Episcopal District. Below, she shares her reflections on the vital role of churches in reducing vaccine hesitancy and increasing vaccine equity.

What are some reasons people have vaccine hesitancy in Alabama (USA), where you are based?

There are a number of reasons people are hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine. First, some think the vaccine was made too quickly, because they lack an understanding of vaccine development and ongoing scientific research that enabled this particular vaccine to be produced using already-tested technology. Second, the vaccine became a political issue. Some people believe the vaccine is a statement of support for a particular political ideology. Third, particularly for African-Americans, there is hesitancy based on historic health disparities and undisclosed,



unauthorized research and experimentation on Black people. There is fear that the vaccine is a repeat and has consequences/side effects of which we are not being informed. Finally, many people have heard various conspiracy-type theories about the vaccine related to the reasons I cited above.

What are some positive ways churches are helping people overcome their hesitancy?

I divide this into three main areas.

Information and education. Churches can provide accurate information to people about this vaccine, its development, and what it does and does not do. Workshops, webinars, flyers, bulletin boards, social media, etc. are all a great means of this information/education campaign.

Access. Churches can assist people with making appointments, set up "pop-up" vaccine sites in their parking lots, and/or provide transportation to vaccine appointments.

Networking and partnerships. Churches should develop partnerships with local, regional and/or state health agencies, clinics, hospitals, other healthcare providers and other churches to accomplish the two initiatives identified.

What can we pray for you and your churches as you continue to face these challenges?

Pray for energy to continue to inform, educate and provide resources to congregations and communities. Some messages have to be repeated over and over again.

Pray for those most vulnerable to the coronavirus, and perhaps fearful to get the vaccine because they have so many other health issues.

Pray for the sick.

Pray for the grieving.

Pray that we can hear God's voice as we live into new ways of being the church of Jesus Christ in a world that has been altered by this pandemic.

CONSULTATION ON 'ENSURE GENDER EQUALITY; EMPOWER WOMEN AND LIFT UP HUMANITY'

"Instilling hope and positive attitude for gender equality is a way to build a just society," affirm participants of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) consultation held online over two days. The online Consultation, which was held on 8 and 9 July 2021, was attended by over 70 participants.

The consultation called for stronger commitments from every corner of society to promote the empowerment of women through "attentive solidarity and radical inclusion". "We must unite and stand with the disenfranchised women who are undergoing multiple forms of oppression during the COVID-19 pandemic," was the message collectively expressed by the participants.

The participants of the consultation further noted that the involvement and increase of women's participation in decision-making within churches was the best strategy for churches and church-related organisations to address gender equality and prevent other forms of discrimination.

The participants, both women and men, representing a wide cross-section of organisations across Asia, opined that special efforts were to be supplemented with the nurturing of women cadres among church leaders, re-interpreting certain texts of the Bible, and transforming cultural traditions or social norms that prevent women from being able to exercise their leadership to the fullest of their potentials and capacities.

Koh Miyaoi, Gender Advisor at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Asia Regional Hub, and Hanbeet Rhee, Coordinator of Gender Equality programme of YWCA in South Korea spoke at a panel discussion session on 'Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

Goals: Eliminate Violence Against Women'. Ms Miyaoi, an experienced expert on gender equality and women's rights issues, stated that along with the health crisis, women were facing a care crisis, an economic crisis, and a shadow pandemic.

The UNDP official further analysed the neglect of women's challenges in designing pandemic recovery and stimulus packages and highlighted the dismal participation of women as leaders in COVID-19 taskforces across Asian countries.

"If we do not see women in decision-making bodies determining what stimulus packages are given and when, deciding what services are essential and how we must re-open, then issues faced more by women than men are not going to be addressed or countered," said Ms Miyaoi.

Rev. Dr Jeaneth Faller, the Dean of the Divinity School at Siliman University in the Philippines, who led a biblical-theological reflection on 'Towards Violence-Free Lives for Women' shared the suffering and despair of Rizpah of the Old Testament as a synonym for the common struggle of Asian women today.

Rizpah represents the abusive subordination that so many women in Asia suffer in our cultures, which have failed to undo the economic and social disparities among our peoples. However, her story ends in redemption not just for one woman but for all—as she looked up from despair and found the courage to use the small and limited spaces available to act rather than to conform, to rise up rather than remain bent down, explained Dr Faller.

Rev. Apituley, who was the Chief of Staff for the Executive Office of the President of Indonesia, focused her presentation on feminist leadership and substantive gender equality.

"The challenges of a patriarchal culture in all areas of life, the intersection of gender discrimination with other aspects, and a lack of political will on the part of our leaders have been proven to have hampered the achievement of substantive gender equality and gender justice. The opening of opportunities for women to be elected as leaders at the national/synodal level is not a result of the church's systematic or strategic work but are fruits of individual struggles," she added.

Ms Nauman spoke of the importance and value of cementing notions of the equality of the sexes from childhood itself through education and schooling. She shared different strategies for building the capacity of women as leaders, such as through mentoring and counselling, skills and resilience development, scholarships and other opportunities, and small business loans or microfinancing.

MISSION AND ECUMENICAL - Office Relocation

MME is no longer based in an office at the MCNZ Building at 409 Great South Road, Ellerslie; as of 1 July 2021. The Acting Director will be working from his home office.

MISSION AND ECUMENICAL BOARD
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