

METHODIST MISSION AND ECUMENICAL NEWSLETTER

April 2020

Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic Archbishop Anastasios says, "LET US TRANSMIT FROM HEART TO HEART THE LIGHT OF HOPE" –

Interview with the Archbishop of Albania, former President of the WCC by Marianne Ejdersten, WCC director of Communication. 28 March 2020



Photo: Xanthi Morfi/WC

Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania shares his perspective in this E-interview about the way churches are adapting, both in Albania and worldwide, to the COVID-19 pandemic. As we pray for the researchers trying to find a treatment, churches can also emphasize our duty to

stay at home while, at the same time, freeing ourselves from fear and anxiety. We must find ways to assist the sick directly or indirectly, as we prepare for Easter, and open our hearts to the light of hope. ...

The common prayer for all countries is that we may pass this trial with the fewest number of victims. This pandemic creates not only infirmities, but also creates widespread economic consequences, especially devastating for poorer countries like Albania which has also recently suffered from the disastrous effects of a great earthquake. The pandemic is not local; it is global. Therefore, the response must also be with a global solidarity in order to have a 'globalization of solidarity.' The richer countries have a responsibility to assist the poorer countries, like Albania, that will suffer more acute consequences of the financial troubles and social problems.

Since we are in the period of preparation for Easter, let us remember that the crucified and resurrected Christ offered to His disciples peace and freedom from fear, promising them that He will remain with them through all tribulations until the end of time. We must increase this confidence in His presence and in the fact that He will not abandon us in our trial. Let us celebrate Easter free of every syndrome

of fear and anxiety, let us resist. This year we shall not be able to transmit the Paschal light from candle to candle - as is the custom of the Orthodox Churches. **Let us transmit from heart to heart the light of hope and fearlessness in our Risen Lord.**

Full version of the interviews is available at:

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/archbishop-anastasios-let-us-transmit-from-heart-to-heart-the-light-of-hope-1>

"They showed us unusual kindness." Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will be observed from 24 to 31 May 2020 in the southern hemisphere. The theme for 2020 is "They showed us unusual kindness" from Paul's words in Acts 28:2.

The Construction Work in Kokeqolo Steady Progress with Water Project

I am delighted to share with you this news from Munda, Solomon Islands. The long waited Water Supply Project for the village of Kokeqolo is nearing completion. This is another project the donors from the Methodist and Cooperating congregations have supported.

Mr Braena Bird general secretary of the United Church Solomon Islands Assembly office says,

Dear Rev Prince,

Greetings from the UCSI Headquarter in Kokeqolo.

I prepared this quick update for your information. Please find attached is a collection of progress photos. We are trying to have the project completed by next week. The water tank will finally be transported to the Ship tomorrow to be shipped down to Kokeqolo. Hopefully it should be in Munda next week. The water facility is a real blessing for Kokeqolo. It will provide running water for the station. It is also timely at this time as water is crucially important for survival in emerging situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Honiara is placed in a state of emergency as declared by the Governor General. We are still okay in the provinces, however very cautious and alert. It is hoped we should have the water system completed up and running by end of next week if shipping services are not further delayed.

Our prayers and thoughts are with you and the rest of the world in this time of great trials.

Blessings

Brian Bird

Brian Bird sent the following photos from Munda:

Trenches towards the Kokeqolo church for the feeder pipeline



Trench towards the Stand tap for village



Trench for the pipeline along the Youth Centre – the facility with accommodation for visitors.



*The foundation laid for the supply tank.
Awaiting its arrival in Munda*



Work in progress at Kokeqolo



Pump house and the trench to connect pipeline to the supply tank

The water supply project will be completed by mid-April provided the tank arrives from Honiara on time. Honiara is under lock-down due to the COVID 19 pandemic. All international arrivals have been suspended.

- Prince D.

IN JOINT STATEMENT, ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS THE WORLD STAND TOGETHER TO PROTECT LIFE - 26 March 2020

In a historic joint pastoral statement released on 26 March, the World Council of Churches and Regional Ecumenical Organizations affirmed the urgency of standing together to protect life amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the first time ever, all regions in the ecumenical movement around the world are standing together with a common message that urges both prayers and action for one world to protect life. "We urge people everywhere to give highest priority to addressing this situation and assisting in whatever ways we can in our collective efforts to protect life," the statement reads.

For the sake of God's love, "it is important and urgent that we adapt our modes of worship and fellowship to the needs of this time of pandemic infection, in order to avoid the risk of becoming sources of viral transmission rather than means of grace," stated the global ecumenical leaders.

The ecumenical leaders recalled, "Our faith in the God of life compels us to protect life" and continued, "Let us manifest God's unconditional love in safe, practical ways that protect life, alleviate suffering, and ensure that churches and public services do not become hubs of transmission of the virus."

The leaders of the global and regional ecumenical organizations affirmed that physical distancing does not mean spiritual isolation, and they urged churches all over the world to review their role in society by safely ministering to, providing for, and caring for the poor, the sick, the marginalized, and the aged – especially all those who are most at risk due to COVID-19.

The general secretaries further stated, "People in many parts of the world have become homebound these days. Being homebound does not mean that we cannot experience a deep spiritual solidarity with each other, by virtue of our baptism into the one body of Christ."

The statement suggests praying at home, giving thanks to God for strength, healing, and courage. "We can show our love for God and our neighbor by not gathering in person for public worship," reads the text. "Many congregations can share their worship gatherings online or digitally. Members and pastors can also stay in touch with each other and provide pastoral care by telephone."

The novel coronavirus pandemic has reached all the regions of our planet, the text continues. "There are fear and panic, pain and suffering, doubt and

misinformation, about both the virus and our response as Christians," the text reads. "Amid stories of suffering and tragedy, there are also stories of simple kindness and extravagant love, of solidarity and the sharing of hope and peace in innovative and surprising ways."

The general secretaries also urged all to consider the needs of the most vulnerable people in the world. "In the midst of this grave crisis, we lift up prayers for those providing leadership and for governments around the world, urging them to give priority concern to those who live in poverty as well as to the marginalized and refugees living in our midst," the statement concludes.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/joint-statement-of-wcc-and-regional-ecumenical-organizations-affirm-to-stand-together-to-protect-life>

BOSSEY ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE OPENS APPLICATIONS FOR 'EXCEPTIONAL STUDY YEAR' - 26 March 2020



Château de Bossey. Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/bossey-ecumenical-institute-opens-applications-for-exceptional-study-year>

When asked on the day of her graduation how she would describe Bossey, former student Quantisha Mason replied, 'Bossey is like a love letter to God.' Today, the Ecumenical Institute invites prospective students to apply for the study year of 2021-2022.

The Institute, sitting on the banks of Lake Geneva in the Swiss countryside, is looking forward to a study year out of the ordinary. Studies in 2021-2022 will include not just residential studies onsite at the Château de Bossey, but also participation in a Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) as well as attending the World Council of Churches 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in September 2021.

"The study year of 2021-2022 will be exceptional," reflects Fr Prof. Dr Lawrence Iwuamadi, academic dean at the Ecumenical Institute. "Students admitted to studies in Bossey will automatically be enrolled in the upcoming GETI, too, with all that it entails as a blended learning process of online studies and a residential phase in connection with the WCC's 11th Assembly,"

he adds. "This is an opportunity no young ecumenist would want to miss," he says, speaking from the position of someone who has seen many generations of Bossey students experience what the Institute has to offer. In view of the timing of the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, the study year of 2021-2022 begins with arrival in Switzerland on 26-28 August 2021.

The deadline for applications is 1 September 2020.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION ROOTED IN JUSTICE

- 06 March 2020

A recent consultation took important steps to find a faithful paradigm of thinking over the issue of "Freedom of Religion or Belief." Twenty-two church leaders and theologians gathered in Hattersheim am Main, Germany, 25-27 February, to discuss this issue in light of the global rise of ethno-nationalisms, xenophobia, interreligious intolerance, patriarchal hegemony and racism.

"Given the present rise of ethno-nationalisms that use religion as identity markers and for legitimization of violence, it is imperative that we as people of faith be able to support the freedom of religion and work towards a world in which all people of faith have the freedom of expression, articulation and propagation of their faith," said Philip Vinod Peacock, executive secretary for justice and witness of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

"The infringement of the right to freedom of religion or belief, especially of the most vulnerable, by the populist nationalisms of today that have surreptitiously co-opted the moral premise of the protection of freedom of religion for their own vested agendas, presents one of the most painful and paradoxical moral wounds of our times," agreed Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, programme coordinator for interreligious dialogue and cooperation of the World Council of Churches.

Formal contributions to the consultation came in several forms with keynote addresses by Heiner Bielefeldt, Lesmore Ezekiel and Heidi Hadsel; Bible studies by Mitri Raheb, Septemmy Lankawa and Dianna Wright; and regional perspectives from Peggy Kabonde, Joas Adiprasetya, Farhana Nazir, Junaid Ahmed, Eve Parker, Odor Balazs, HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Anna Case Winters and Abraham Mathew.

In a final statement, the consultation "recognized that the present global climate necessitates interreligious cooperation and the building of alliances that are committed to a world that is predicated on justice and freedom" and that "the question of the freedom of religion must be located in the question of justice."

"As a Muslim public intellectual committed to interfaith dialogue for peace and justice, there was no forum that I found to be more hospitable and receptive to the interreligious work we are involved in than our gathering," said Junaid Ahmad, professor of religion and world politics at the National Defence University (Pakistan).

"To listen to and engage with Christian theologians, activists and thought-leaders was an extraordinary experience precisely because of the possibilities it offers in a world increasingly torn by ideologies—'fundamentalisms' of both the religious and secular variety—that seek to advance the most dangerous forms of authoritarianism, xenophobia and racism, including the most alarming of our time: Islamophobia," Ahmad said.

Noting John Calvin's assertion that "all humans have an inherent God-given dignity, meaning our rights are rooted in God," the consultation stated, "We therefore cannot speak about the freedom of religion without speaking of justice and dignity of all humans."

The statement went on to strongly condemn all forms of religious discrimination, oppression and persecution. "We are called to assume a theology of courageous risk and a radical and mutual hospitality. For this we can look to examples of religious cooperation and support even in the midst of religious violence. We recognize that only an interreligious community of imagination can challenge nationalist notions of intolerant religiosity that deny the dignity and religious freedoms of the vulnerable. We call for a lived theology of resistance, restoration and reconciliation."

"The relevance and timeliness of this meeting rests on its vision to confront such abusive perversions by exploring a model of faithful engagement that is at the same time critical of the dominant, committed to the vulnerable and 'com-passionate' (comradely and passionate) in its approach," said Rajkumar.

The consultation was co-hosted by the World Communion of Reformed Churches and World Council of Churches and made possible through funding by *Otto per Mille*.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/freedom-of-religion-rooted-in-justice>

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