

# METHODIST MISSION AND ECUMENICAL NEWSLETTER

## May 2020

The letter from Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Ecumenism to Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council calling for an international day of prayer on 14 May 2020 is copied here for your information and action. *Prince Devanandan*



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM  
AD CHRISTIANORUM UNITATEM FOVENDAM

*E Civitate Vaticana die, 7 May 2020*

PROT.N 351/2020/e

BISHOP IVAN M. ABRAHAMS  
*General Secretary*  
World Methodist Council

Dear Bishop Abrahams,

In his weekly midday prayer on Sunday 3 May Pope Francis publically supported the call of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity addressed to all believers and people of goodwill to observe a Day of prayer, fasting and works of charity on Thursday 14 May to implore God's help in overcoming the pandemic caused by Covid-19. Pope Francis expressed the hope that Christians would take part in the initiative. The Higher Committee of Human Fraternity was established after Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of al-Azhar, signed a document in 2019 on promoting dialogue and human fraternity.

No public function is being recommended, since everyone should be careful not to increase the danger of contagion.

All nevertheless would be joined in witnessing to the universal value of prayer, fasting and good works as "a witness to the greatness of faith in God that unites divided hearts and elevates the human soul" (Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together). In fact, this is not a time for indifference, because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic (cf. Pope Francis, Easter Urbi et Orbi Message 2020).

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity is pleased to bring the above to your kind attention.

With prayerful and respectful best wishes in the Risen Lord,

Cardinal Kurt Koch  
*President*

**“They showed us unusual kindness.”  
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity  
24 to 31 May 2020**

At least once a year, Christians are reminded of Jesus’ prayer for his disciples that “they may be one so that the world may believe” (see John 17.21). Hearts are touched and Christians come together to pray for their unity. Congregations and parishes all over the world exchange preachers or arrange special ecumenical celebrations and prayer services. The event that touches off this special experience is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Traditionally the week of prayer is celebrated between 18-25 January, between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul. In the southern hemisphere, where January is a vacation time, churches often find other days to celebrate it, for example around Pentecost, which is also a symbolic date for unity.

The theme for the week of prayer in 2020, “They showed us unusual kindness...” is inspired by Acts 28:2. The **resources** for the week have been prepared by members of different churches in Malta.

**Kokeqolo Water Project Completed**

The waiting for the water tank was over as it arrived in Munda on 10 April 2020.

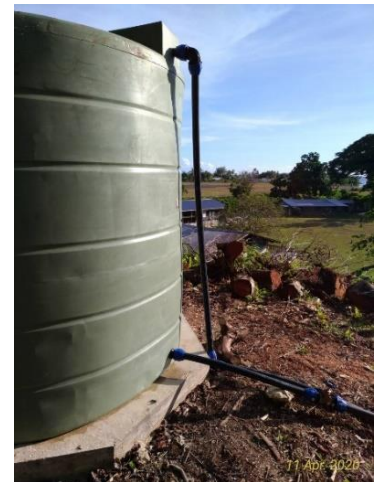


Contractors and the church office people got into action immediately to ensure water flow in taps on Easter Sunday. The laying of pipelines was completed prior to the tank arriving.

*The tank being loaded into a truck from the ferry.*

Eddie Pratt from the United Church Solomon Islands office sent me a message. “Tanks was connected and being filled. Water should be running from this evening (Saturday 11 April). Much needed water is now flowing. We cannot thank you enough.” I sent the following message to be read in church on Easter Sunday. “Thank God for the generosity of the people who donated to make

it happen. I greet all in Kokeqolo in name of our risen Lord Jesus. This is a gift for God’s people in Kokeqolo. While you all enjoy the water in taps, I ask you all to use the facility responsibly, care for it and make sure it is not damaged. It is something I have been dreaming about for the past 4 years. Now it has become a dream come true. I join you in thanking God for this blessing.”



Eddie sent another message later, “I am excited to tell you. I have my shower under the new standpipe. I believe everyone else also do.” Following day, Easter Sunday, I received another



message: Brian Bird read your message in our Sunday service. Cliff Bird offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of the water supply. Everyone is happy. It is one good thing happening in the midst of all the news about COVID19. Thank you.”

I was intending to be present at Kokeqolo for this event. However, the travel restrictions prevented me and others who were to join in this visit. The work is done and the people of Kokeqolo are now enjoying the benefit. This was made possible again by the good hearted people of Te Haahi Weteriana o Aotearoa who contributed towards raising the NZ \$ 35,000 for this project. - Prince D.

### **WCC SHARES TOOLS TO PROTECT CHILDREN AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE - 30 April 2020**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has launched a campaign and a toolkit with practical and spiritual resources for pastors, leaders, and Sunday schools to facilitate real conversation and help churches create a safer world for children.

"In these days of concern about global health, we must not forget children," said WCC acting general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca. "By giving ourselves the tools to recognize the signs, to talk about it, and to report it, we can all help protect children against physically and emotionally traumatizing abuse," concluded Sauca.

The "Out of the shadows and into the light" campaign and toolkit is a concrete step to raise awareness on risks and responses to protect children, particularly in the context of confinement caused by the COVID-19 crisis. It acknowledges that churches are well placed to raise awareness of threats of child sexual abuse and put in place preventive measures and support victims, especially among the most vulnerable.

Churches from Tanzania, Nigeria, India, Indonesia and the Philippines have participated in a pilot project of the campaign that offered capacity-building workshops to church representatives. The work done in these targeted countries helped to shape the toolkit, and to develop national action plans in response to the issues raised by the [Out of the Shadows Index](#). Undertaken by the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#), the index measures how national actors in 60 countries address child sexual abuse and exploitation.

The campaign and toolkit support WCC's Churches' Commitments to Children programme, which was developed with member churches, UNICEF and other key partners to promote concrete actions that any churches can undertake to respect and protect children's rights.

Following the launch of the toolkit, the "Out of

the shadows" campaign will support churches that want to collaborate in the dissemination of the findings and recommendations of the campaign and promote national toll-free child helplines. *More resources available at the following links:*

### **Out of the shadows toolkit**

<https://seafile.ecucenter.org/d/e46ccc62ed1249faaaf1/>

### **[Letter to the World Council of Churches member churches and Central Committee members about the Out of the Shadows campaign and toolkit](#)**

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-shares-tools-to-protect-children-against-sexual-violence>

### **OPEN LETTER TO THE GLOBAL ECUMENICAL COMMUNITY ON THE "WUPPERTAL DECLARATION":**

### **NOT MISREADING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES!**

"Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute." Proverbs 31:8

"We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

In June 2019, representatives from numerous countries and different denominational and faith traditions gathered in Wuppertal, Germany, to discuss the profound global ecological crisis. The conference was entitled "Together towards eco-theologies, ethics of sustainability and eco-friendly churches" and concluded with the adoption of the Wuppertal Call "Kairos for Creation – Confessing Hope for the Earth" (see appendix). The German organizers – the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany, the United Evangelical Mission and Bread for the World – took the opportunity of including a far-reaching proposal with regard to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which is likewise to take place in Germany in September 2021. The proposal calls on the global ecumenical movement to plan a decade of ecological learning, confessing and comprehensive action against climate change and to launch it at the WCC assembly. However desirable it might be for the WCC to

focus on the global climate crisis, we, the undersigned, are convinced that it would by no means be helpful if the root causes of the crises were concealed, as is the case in the Wuppertal Declaration. The latter largely disregards the systemic character of the very crisis of our capitalist civilization; instead, it reduces the necessary change to a transformation defined first and foremost in merely ecological terms. In view of the multiple crisis of the prevailing (dis)order, however, it has long been obvious that the question of ecological justice can no longer be separated from the question of economic and social justice and that a solution can therefore not solely consist in a gradual exit from our fossil-based mode of production. Instead, the issue is about overcoming the “imperial mode of living” and a fundamentally different economic system. With its simplified and one-sided analysis, the Wuppertal proposal ignores and counteracts the comprehensive and fundamental criticism of the global economic structures as expressed by the worldwide ecumenical movement between 1983 and 2013 in its systematic examination of economic globalization. This criticism is also reflected in recent ecumenical declarations on the need for a new international financial and economic architecture (NIFEA). The unanimous tone of the clear insights gained over many years at the global level is that – as the Lutheran World Federation put it at its 10th Assembly in 2003 – the prevailing economic order, including the ideology determining its mechanisms, is tantamount to “idolatry”, since “the market, built on private property, unrestrained competition and the centrality of contracts, is the absolute law governing human life, society and the natural environment”. The deeper roots of the resulting massive threat to life were recognized a year later by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches at its General Council as “the product of an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life or death” (The Accra Confession). The WCC was equally clear in its 2012 “Call to Action: Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All”: “Greed and injustice, seeking easy profit, unjust privileges and short-term advantages at the expense of long-term and sustainable goals are the root causes of interrelated crises (...).

These life-destroying values (...) dominate today's structures.” Against this background, the theological and ecclesiological consequence for worldwide ecumenism was expressed in almost identical terms: that the question of global economic justice is a fundamental question for faith in God and Christian discipleship, and that the prevailing economic system is incompatible with being Christian and being church on grounds of faith. Accordingly, the predominant socio-economic and geo-strategic power structures should now be questioned more clearly than ever, and the (neo-) capitalist mode of production and living should be overcome with the aim of developing sustainable alternatives. Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium” and the encyclical “Laudato si” have resonated encouragingly with the prophetic nature of these ecumenical resolutions. **They are, however, rarely put into practice in the ecumenical movement and the churches.** All too often, ecumenical action is limited to appeals for merely cosmetic reforms of the structurally destructive global economic system. This is due to a ‘restraint’ considered necessary to avoid conflicts with political and economic decision-makers – as in the Wuppertal Declaration, which fails to mention that social and climate justice for all people can only be achieved through a fundamental socio-ecological transformation. And this ultimately requires a radical renunciation of the capitalist driving forces of growth and profit, which have dominated our economies up to now, and a shift towards an economy that focuses on the common good and the protection of the natural life support systems. Or to quote the global climate movement Fridays for Future: “System change, not climate change!” The WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2021 and the election of a new WCC general secretary in August 2020 offer the opportunity to initiate what we consider to be the indispensable reorientation of the WCC towards a renewed, much more intensive and, above all, determined engagement with the crises of survival of humankind and creation, and their causes. A “Decade for the Healing of Creation” may well provide the framework, but only if its thrust is appropriate to the dangerous nature of the threats. In view of the dramatic signs of the times, we would like, with this Open Letter, to

pave the way for a debate on this issue in the run-up to the Assembly – and not just at Karlsruhe itself. We hope such a debate can be open-minded and take account of the entire breadth of the ecumenical movement.

April 20, 2020

The list of signatories to the letter is available at <https://kairoseuropa.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2021-Open-letter-final.pdf>

**WCC ACTING GENERAL SECRETARY  
REFLECTS ON OPEN LETTER FROM KAIROS  
EUROPA ABOUT WUPPERTAL  
DECLARATION ON SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL  
TRANSFORMATION - 29 April 2020**

*Following is the response of World Council of Churches (WCC) acting general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca to an open letter to the global ecumenical community on the Wuppertal Declaration, a conference message released in June 2019, when representatives from numerous countries and different denominational and faith traditions gathered in Wuppertal, Germany, to discuss the profound global ecological crisis.*

**What was the general reaction when the WCC, along with many others in the ecumenical movement, received this letter?**

**Rev. Dr Sauca:** The WCC is a fellowship of churches and we welcome all forms of dialogue. The WCC considers the Wuppertal Declaration as an important conference message. It is the outcome of an initiative led by a WCC member church and international organizations on June 2019, with broad representation following an international ecumenical conference focusing on issues of eco-theology, ethics of sustainability and eco-friendly churches. The WCC was one of the co-organisers of the meeting and was represented in the gathering. Even if the Declaration does explicitly link the climate crisis to human greed, expressing more clearly the key role of the broken world economic order in producing and aggravating the ecological crisis, it remains a powerful voice for global action with specific suggestions that can be followed up and deepened.

As the main expression of the global ecumenical movement, the WCC operates in a wide range of contexts marked by diversity of identities, priorities and points of view. What holds the WCC together institutionally, also in terms of what the fellowship declares publicly, is the common voice that grows from our governing bodies, which, in many ways represents and streamlines that diversity and constantly seeks to reach consensus

in a constructive and prophetic way. In this sense, it is important to highlight that the WCC Central Committee, Executive Committee and the general secretariat have been constantly affirming that economic and ecologic justice can never be separated.

**How did you react to the criticism of the Wuppertal Call in the letter?**

**Rev. Dr Sauca:** The open letter is not a criticism of WCC, but a critical look at the Wuppertal Declaration. It is a constructive criticism of the Wuppertal Declaration and will hopefully lead to deeper discussions and analyses. We always welcome dialogue and deeper reflection.

**How will the WCC respond to the open letter?**

**Rev. Dr Sauca:** Since the letter was not directed in particular to the WCC, we do not see the need to respond with another letter. We see our role in convening and bringing people with different opinions and perspectives around the table, to dialogue. As one of the co-organisers of the Wuppertal conference, we would like to reiterate the aforementioned affirmations and sharing key WCC statements that challenge the false dichotomy between economy and ecology and hold together justice and sustainability (as one cannot be achieved without the other). Both the Wuppertal Declaration and the open letter are very relevant and valuable inputs to the ecumenical movement to ensure that ecological justice will be addressed in a holistic manner, in the context of economic justice. We see that one of the roles of the WCC in this scenario is to work as the convener of such dialogue. It is only by working together that we can jointly ensure that the ecumenical movement will get the benefit of united and holistic responses to the existential challenges that humanity and creation face today. As the WCC fellowship is preparing for the 11th WCC Assembly to be held in Karlsruhe in September 2021, we look forward to having these issues discussed and further analysed in ecumenical conversations at the assembly.

**MISSION AND ECUMENICAL BOARD**

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