



**Christ's love
moves the world
to reconciliation
and unity**

World Council of Churches
11th Assembly
Karlsruhe, Germany
31 August – 8 September, 2022



**World Council
of Churches**
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Sincere thanks to the following Church denominations for their prayers, blessings and financial support enabling GRASSROOTS Luton to be represented at the World Council of Churches 11th Assembly held from 31st Aug – 8th Sep 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany

United Reformed Church Thames North Synod
Beds Essex & Herts District of The Methodist Church

Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton
Church of England St Albans Diocese

It is humbling that GRASSROOTS Luton was invited to lead a Workshop at the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th General Assembly 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany from 31 August – 8 September 2022.

GRASSROOTS Luton Workshop Title was: Celebrating Difference Staying Faithful – Building Life Flourishing Communities Together with People of Different Faiths. Here's a brief reflection on what we delivered in our workshop.

Mostly inter faith work is understood as “dialogue” with learned people of certain age and gender. In this workshop, we shared practical examples of inter faith community work we have carried out in Luton over the years. We shared stories of how in a super-diverse, multi-faith, multi-cultural town Luton (UK), just north of London, where over 140 languages are spoken, Christians & people of different faiths join together to feed the hungry, to tackle digital and fuel poverty, to plant trees and create peace gardens. We demonstrated how it is possible to restore justice, peace and the integrity of God's creation, by putting our faith into action, by complementing one another and not competing against one another, by acknowledging and celebrating difference and yet staying faithful to our own religious and cultural identities.

Many people across Europe and world know of Luton as the birthplace of one of the far right extremist groups called English Defence League (EDL). We shared stories of why and how it was started in Luton. How all faith communities united together against all extremism, and on multiple occasions, prevented communal riots, ensuring peace & integrity of the town is held at all times and particularly safeguarding our young people that they are not criminalised.

Thanks to the globalisation we are living in an increasingly inter-connected world. We all must therefore create space for everyone to feel welcomed to partake in and contribute to God's mission, so that in God's beautiful world, everyone may have life – life in all its abundance, life in all its fullness. How do we create such ecumenical and inter-faith space? How can we confidently move in Christ's love towards reconciliation and unity, but not uniformity? This workshop focused exactly on all that.

It was worth telling our story on a global platform. Our workshop had the highest number of registrations. People who attended our workshop were greatly inspired by the ecumenical and inter faith aspects of our work. They were impressed by the consistency and conviction with which we have, over the years, kept ourselves focused and rooted within a very diverse and complex context of Luton. We have been ‘acting while reflecting’, and have remained adaptable, receptive and relational in order to be effective and authentic on the ground. **As a result, a Dutch Church Minister-in-training is coming for Internship at GRASSROOTS Luton for 6 weeks from 10th April – 20th May 2023.**

**A Brief Report on the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th Assembly
held from 31st Aug – 8th Sep 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany**

The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held in Karlsruhe, Germany from 31 August to 8 September, was held under the theme "Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity."

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a worldwide Christian inter-church organization founded in 1948 to work for the cause of ecumenism (Christian Unity). Nearly 350 WCC's member denominations represent over 500 million Christians in more than 110 countries. The WCC Assembly is the highest governing body of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and normally meets every eight years.

In the aftermath of Covid disruptions, the 11th WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany brought together more than 4000 delegates and over 1000 participants, from all over the world. 127 young people from over 50 countries served as stewards.

The last assembly in Europe took place in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968. The WCC therefore gladly accepted the invitation of the member churches in Germany to hold the 11th assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany.

On being presented with a Tree of Hope by the WCC, the Mayor of Karlsruhe said ***"You leave behind this tree as a reminder of God's compassion and love for creation - this is a wonderful sign of optimism and we'll ensure it grows in the years to come here in Karlsruhe. Your tree compliments our oldest tree in front of the Kongress Centre which is as old as Karlsruhe – so your presence & power will stay with us forever."*** He added ***"We created wars, climate change and destruction. Trees are a reminder to reconstruct, to restore what we have destroyed, but most importantly it also reminds us that we are not the original constructors or creators and so we must act with a sense of duty and care towards what has been given as a God's precious gift of creation to us all for our sustenance and flourishing."***

Mother Earth is not our creation but it is ours to protect.

Ecumenical cooperation for the Care of creation and the need to build a compassionate civilisation (nonviolent economy) was the key focus at the Assembly, but several other issues were also raised by delegates from different parts of the world e.g.

- Palestinian Christians reminded anti-semitism isn't same as anti-Zionism and insisted the word 'apartheid' be used to describe Israel's continuing dispossession and displacement of Palestinians
- Nigerians reminded the need for a strategic intervention and unified Christian uprising, against Islamisation & ethnic cleansing in the name of religion in parts of Nigeria
- Lebanese observed that the assembly theme is topical, contemporary and relevant to their context and therefore strengthening good inter faith relations is crucial
- Indigenous people of Papua New Guinea called for their right of determination to be able to survive
- Swedish youth expressed passion & pain for climate change
- Cuba shared concerns re US Blockade, Brazil re Amazon Forest, Venezuela talked of education for migrant children, Indonesia highlighted human trafficking & modern slavery

The Assembly reflected how Christian voice and action can be enabled and empowered to call out injustices in our world, affecting peoples and nations through the ongoing wars, conflicts, poverty, hunger, exploitation of human and natural resources and indigenous people, and violence against women etc.

Bible Studies

Bible studies helped delegates in understanding that our problems cannot be solved by the same human consciousness which created the problems in the first place. We must therefore seek the transformation of ourselves, and of others – transformation from ego to eco, from quantity to quality and from our love of war & death to the love of life. We have to act and enable our present generation to choose life so that we and our descendants can live. We have to be the change we want to see in our world.

“Transforming our Habits” in response to the call of global ecological conversion is crucial. “Transforming our Habits” require consistent and day to day lifestyle & lifetime changes than to be making one-off historic decisions (which are also important).

WCC urged “all member churches, ecumenical partners and Christian communities to be (not just followers but) the leaders in bringing the changes for which we advocate.” It proclaimed when we dream alone it’s just a dream but when we dream together it’s a reality.

Reflection on the Plenary Discussions

Plenary discussions highlighted that we are living in a world of fake news & narratives which are causing polarization. Wars and conflicts are strategically used to destabilise nations resulting in displacement of multitudes. We are living in a world of exclusion, increasingly dividing and segregating people in the name of ethnicity and religion. World’s 80% population follows religion and yet the world is in a state as we see it today. Self-centeredness & self-righteousness of those few in the positions of power & privilege are impacting negatively the lives of millions & billions of peoples across the world.

In the post pandemic context, we are faced with twin economic & ecological crises and at its centre is the human greed. The choice and implementation of the Eurocentric development frameworks is most unhelpful, which undermines everyone else’s interests and growth prospects.

To promote inclusion amidst such self-preserving economic and political assertions of the powerful nations is not an easy task, but it’s not impossible either. As faith communities we are obliged to strive towards life affirming initiatives. But **Inclusion is a serious affair. It must comprise of the process of who & what is someone being included into and on what terms and whose terms? Who has the power to include?**

Jesus way of compassionate & reconciliatory lifestyle is about ensuring that no one is left behind & no one is left out and that dignity of every human being and that of the creation is preserved.

Compassion & conservation are connected. We must serve and preserve our neighbour and our creation.

As faith communities we are very good in defining sin and sinners but we are very weak in talking about those who are sinned against.

We must therefore choose to re-act and re-create. We must choose to not just empower but embrace those who are sinned against. And our actions and re-actions, creation and re-creation must not be just about achieving outcomes but it must be concerned with the transformation – transformation towards a new, inclusive, serving and conserving lifestyles.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

A Powerful Reminder by Conference of Europe Churches (CEC)

Outgoing WCC President for Europe said Europe faces challenges with global consequences. No country in Europe can ignore the Pressures of migration & refugees caused by the Ukraine war. We therefore must explore how best we can express Christ's love in our world today.

Conference of Europe Churches (CEC) thanked WCC for substantially addressing the war & its impact in Ukraine. It reflected that all wars come to an end but we mustn't forget to evaluate at what cost. It reminded that 47 to 345 million people are likely to be affected by the cost of life, inflation, energy costs all triggered by the war affecting the most vulnerable in our world all over. 71 million are being plunged into poverty already since the war. We are pursuing economic activities at the cost of others. 10% of the world's population is severely affected by the food crisis. Quoting the story of Good Samaritan, it asked Qs of all the WCC member Churches – **Are we robbers, inn keepers, victims or savior? It affirmed that we are all called to be Good Samaritans to heal the wounded but it emphasized that we must also act to call the robbers for justice.**

A Powerful Reminder by Archbishop Angelous, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London

In his opening address, His eminence His Grace Bishop Angelous (based in Stevenage, UK) reminded that hand of God made us & shaped us, so Church and our world is diverse not by misadventure but by design and we must not understand diversity as divisions. We must in fact challenge it when difference is presented to us as conflict.

He emphasised Jesus is the undeniable source which nourishes us all. We therefore need to keep our eyes on the birthplace of Christianity and not forget our Christian brothers and sisters who live under constant threat and fear for their lives and livelihood.

Referring to Christianity in the Middle East, Bishop Angelous reminded that Christianity wasn't exported there. We are the source of historical reality, and yet Christian minorities in the Middle East are often forgotten and neglected by the world Church.

Cane had tried to shy away from his responsibility by saying "Am I my brother's keeper?" Bishop Angelous challenged all to self-introspect if we are also behaving like Cane? We may not have killed someone or shed our own blood but the blood of our brothers & sisters is shed in the Middle East who have lived there over a millennia. Presence & persecution of Christianity in the Middle East (and in other parts of the world) is a force & a reminder for the need & urgency for reconciliation.

Christians in the Middle East are not victims; they're witnesses – We must never forget them. He concluded, **"It is true that as a Christian we must carry the cross as per our Lord's directive but we should never allow someone else to carry the cross of persecution because of our silence & inaction."**

Another Powerful Reminder by Prof Azza Karam, Secretary General of Religions for Peace

Prof Azza Karam General secretary of Religions for Peace shared that having worked for over two decades at the UN, every year at UN General Assembly she had seen the power of politics but this gathering at WCC feels far more inspirational and genuinely concerned with the well-being of our beautiful world and all its peoples. She asked if Christ's love was only meant for Christians. If not, then what does it mean

practically? She confessed believing in the fact that Christ's love is for her too, even though she is a Muslim. And if Christians also believe this, then we better think how we are going to overcome our differences for the sake of loving, serving, restoring and preserving God's creation. We have the moral obligation to be the conscience of our political establishments. **Self-introspection is needed whether we are also replicating what we are accusing our political establishments of?** Wars may be easier options but we need to remember and remind others that war is not an option and we can and we must do this by demonstrating it in our actions of solidarity shared and exchanged with one another. We & our world deserve Christ's love. **We are all believers. Let us also 'act as believers'.**

Reflection on Matthew 15:21-28 A Gentile Woman Begs For Crumbs From The Master's Table

One day of the Assembly talked about everything in the context of the above cited Gospel passage. Reflecting on it, WCC encouraged member Churches to self-introspect and discern if we are behaving like the crowd in the story or like disciples? Are we being complicit & complacent? Are we being self-congratulatory for having come this far and avoiding to take the prophetic action to the racist & segregating policies & practices perpetuating colonialism and imperialism?

Reflecting on the role of the Gentile woman in the story, it was stressed that women are often at the centre of it all. They are affected, victimized, abused and neglected, most and worst – just like the woman in the Bible story.

Since some in the story regarded this woman as nuisance, she represents how women are portrayed even today. If women speak up they are annoying. If they don't they are incapable, weak & vulnerable. If women are to be recognised as being strong, then women need to demonstrate they are stronger than men. And that's not for someone else to do but women have to do it themselves.

Further reflections on the story pointed out how Jesus demonstrated humility by acknowledging his own prejudice against the woman in the story but he also demonstrated that on being challenged, he changed his mind. It's truly a transformative story. Therefore, **we have no excuse not to work hard to identify, acknowledge and tackle our own prejudices.**

Our radical repentance towards transformation & reconciliation must include changes in our perspectives and attitudes challenging structures which are corrupt and which exclude & undermine the human dignity. It may be difficult but not impossible. It takes time. We need apologies, reparation & justice. Current generations are **benefiting** from the past injustices e.g. slavery benefits. Similarly current generations are also **suffering** because of the past injustices.

It is time to move beyond the well written statements. It is time to move towards tangible actions. We need to be doing things differently if we want to make a difference. Less talk more action is needed. Less worshipping Jesus and more of following Jesus is required. Less theological discernment and more focus is required on our action, which of course must be guided by our theological discernment.

As the Bible Story talks of woman's desire to access the table or at least the crumbs falling from it, it helped the Assembly to reflect on the following Qs in relation to our respective living and working contexts;

Who has access to the table?

Who decides who has the access to it?

Who is already on the table? How and why?

Who is denying access to whom? Or what is preventing some from coming to the table?

Like Jesus in the story didn't first pay attention to the woman, Churches too at times fail to pay attention to the people crying out for help. Like the disciples helped in the process of ignoring the woman, Churches too, being pre-occupied with its survival can ignore the issues and needs and people who require our attention and action.

The woman in the story was called a dog. She still did not get disenchanted or discouraged. Ignored, rejected and humiliated, and yet she chooses not to confront but to assert her right to access the bread if not from the table, at least the crumbs from the floor. It has a strong message for us as Christians, which must provide us food for thought and subsequently inspiration for positive action, despite all our limitations.

To take a look back on the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe—and see how the assembly came together, please

Click this link

<https://www.oikoumene.org/news/a-look-behind-the-scenes-at-the-world-council-of-churches-11th-assembly>

For other info about the WCC 11th Assembly, please press

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