

STUDY DOCUMENT

GOD'S GIFT AND CALL TO UNITY  
- AND OUR COMMITMENT



Unity Statement of the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly  
of the World Council of Churches



## Foreword

Each Assembly of the World Council of Churches produces a Unity Statement – a short reflection on the unity of the Church as both God's gift and God's calling. It is an opportunity for the member churches of the World Council to reflect on progress made on the ecumenical journey to reaffirm our commitment to one another as we travel on towards that goal.

The Assembly in Busan, South Korea, in 2013 was no exception. The Statement was approved and adopted by the Assembly and is offered now to the churches for their consideration. As Scottish delegates and delegated representatives, we are aware that ecumenical statements can sometimes feel remote and academic. We therefore took the decision to issue the Statement with some questions to help readers reflect on the relevance of the Statement in their own context.

It is an ecumenical document and it lends itself to ecumenical study. In offering it to the churches, we encourage its use in ecumenical groups. The Statement is divided into a number of sections with the questions inserted at the end of each section. In this way it is possible to look at the document over a number of meetings as a means of deepening the vision for Christian Unity and the commitment of the Churches in Scotland to one another, as one particular expression of a wider, global movement of Churches. We suggest that the Statement is read in conjunction with the Message.

*January 2014*

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## STUDY I

### God's Gift and Call to Unity - and our Commitment

1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)." Creation is a gift from the living God. We celebrate creation's life in its diversity and give thanks for its goodness. It is the will of God that the whole creation, reconciled in the love of Christ through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, should live together in unity and peace (Eph. 1).

### Our experience

2. Today, the whole creation, the world and its people, live in the tension between the profoundest hope and the deepest despair. We give thanks for the diversity of human cultures, for the wonder of knowledge and learning, for the enthusiasm and vibrancy of many young people, for communities being rebuilt and enemies reconciled, for people being healed, and populations fed. We rejoice when people of different faiths work together for justice and peace. These are signs of hope and new beginnings. But we grieve that there are also places where God's children cry out. Social and economic injustice, poverty and famine, greed and war ravage our world. There is violence and terrorism and the threat of war, particularly nuclear war. Many have to live with HIV and AIDS and suffer from other epidemics; peoples are displaced and their lands dispossessed. Many women and children are victims of violence, inequality and trafficking as are some men. There are those who are marginalised and excluded. We are all in danger of being alienated from our cultures and disconnected from earth. Creation has been misused and we face threats to the balance of life, a growing ecological crisis and the effects of climate change. These are signs of our disordered relations with God, with one another and with creation, and we confess that they dishonour God's gift of life.
3. Within churches we experience a similar tension between celebration and sorrow. There are signs of vibrant life and creative energy in the growth of Christian communities around the world with rich diversity. There is a deepening sense among some churches of needing one another and of being called by Christ to be in unity. In places where churches experience anguish and constant fear of persecution, solidarity between Christians from different traditions in the service of justice and peace is a sign of God's grace. The ecumenical movement has

encouraged new friendships forming a seed bed in which unity can grow. There are places where Christians work and witness together in their local communities and new regional agreements of covenanting, closer fellowship and church unions. Increasingly, we recognize that we are called to share with, and learn from, those of other faiths, to work with them in common efforts for justice and peace and for the preservation of the integrity of God's beautiful but hurting creation. These deepening relationships bring new challenges and enlarge our understanding.

4. We grieve that there are also painful experiences of situations where diversity has turned into division and we do not always recognise the face of Christ in each other. We cannot all gather together around the Table in Eucharistic communion. Divisive issues remain. New issues bring sharp challenges which create new divisions within and between churches. These must be addressed in the fellowship of churches by the way of consensus discernment. Too easily we withdraw into our own traditions and communities refusing to be challenged and enriched by the gifts others hold out to us. Sometimes we seem to embrace the creative new life of faith and yet do not embrace a passion for unity or a longing for fellowship with others. This makes us more ready to tolerate injustice and even conflicts between and within the churches. We are held back as some grow weary and disappointed on the ecumenical path.
5. We do not always honour the God who is the source of our life. Whenever we abuse life through our practices of exclusion and marginalization, our refusal to pursue justice, our unwillingness to live in peace, our failure to seek unity, and our exploitation of creation, we reject the gifts God holds out to us.

*Q/ How do these paragraphs relate to your experience of hope and despair in your church, in the ecumenical movement, and in the world today?*

*Q/ What helps you to live with the tension of hope and despair in your church, in the ecumenical movement, and in the world today?*

## STUDY 2

### Our shared scriptural vision

6. As we read the Scriptures together, under the guidance of the Spirit, our eyes are opened to the place of the community of God's people within creation. Men and women are created in the image and likeness of God and given the responsibility to care for life (Gen. 1:27-28). The covenant with Israel marks a decisive moment in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. The prophets call God's covenanted people to work for justice and peace, to care for the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized, and to be a light to the nations (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 49:6).
7. God sent Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God (John 1). Through his ministry and through his death on the cross Jesus destroyed the walls of separation and hostility, established a new covenant, and brought about genuine unity and reconciliation in his own Body (Eph. 1:9-10 and 2:14-16). He announced the coming Kingdom of God, had compassion on the crowds, healed the sick and preached good news to the poor (Math. 9:35-36; Luke 4:14-24). He reached out to the despised, the sinners, the alien, offering acceptance, and redemption. By his life, death and resurrection, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus revealed the communion of the life of God the Holy Trinity, and opened to all a new way of living in communion with one another in the love of God (1 John 1:1-3). Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples for the sake of the world (John 17:20-24). He entrusted his message and his ministry of unity and reconciliation to his disciples and through them to the Church, which is called to continue his mission (2 Cor. 5: 18-20). From the beginning the community of believers lived together; were devoted to the apostolic teaching and fellowship, breaking bread and praying together; caring for the poor; proclaiming the good news and yet struggling with factions and divisions (Acts 2:42; Acts 15).
8. The Church, as the Body of Christ, embodies Jesus' uniting, reconciling and self-sacrificial love to the world on the cross. At the heart of God's own life of communion is forever a cross and forever resurrection – a reality which is revealed to us and through us. We pray and wait with eager longing for God to renew the whole creation (Rom. 8:19-21). God is always there ahead of us in our pilgrimage, always surprising us, calling us to repentance, forgiving our failures and offering us the gift of new life.

*Q/ Where do you see the message of the Scriptures being lived out today?*

*Q/ How do you give witness to this fundamental truth of death and resurrection?*

Notes:

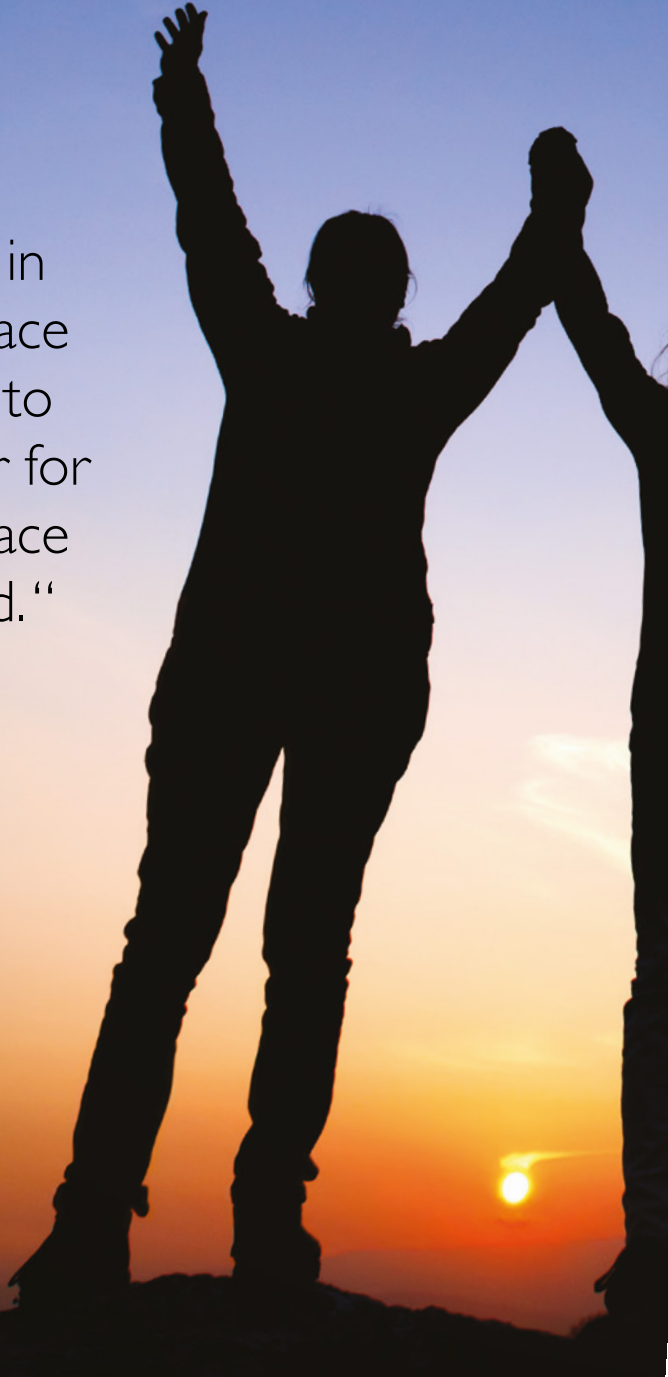


## STUDY 3

### God's call to unity today

9. On our ecumenical journey we have come to understand more about God's call to the Church to serve the unity of all creation. The vocation of the Church is to be: foretaste of new creation; prophetic sign to the whole world of the life God intends for all; and servant spreading the good news of God's Kingdom of justice, peace and love.
10. As foretaste God gives to the Church gracious gifts: the Word, testified to in Holy Scripture to which we are invited to respond in faith in the power of the Holy Spirit; baptism in which we are made a new creation in Christ ; the Eucharist, the fullest expression of communion with God and with one another, which builds up the fellowship and from which we are sent out in mission; an apostolic ministry to draw out and nurture the gifts of all the faithful and to lead the mission of the Church. Conciliar gatherings too are gifts enabling the fellowship, under the Spirit's guidance, to discern the will of God, to teach together and to live sacrificially, serving one another's needs and the world's needs. The unity of the Church is not uniformity; diversity is also a gift, creative and life-giving. But diversity cannot be so great that those in Christ become strangers and enemies to one another, thus damaging the uniting reality of life in Christ. (i)
11. As prophetic sign the Church's vocation is to show forth the life that God wills for the whole creation. We are hardly a credible sign as long as our ecclesial divisions, which spring from fundamental disagreements in faith, remain. Divisions and marginalisation on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, disability, power, status, caste, and other forms of discrimination also obscure the Church's witness to unity. To be a credible sign our life together must reflect the qualities of patience, humility, generosity, attentive listening to one another, mutual accountability, inclusivity, and a willingness to stay together, not saying 'I have no need of you' (1 Cor. 12:21). We are called to be a community upholding justice in its own life, living together in peace, never settling for the easy peace that silences protest and pain, but struggling for the true peace that comes with justice. Only as Christians are being reconciled and renewed by God's Spirit will the Church bear authentic witness to the possibility of reconciled life for all people, for all creation. It is often in its

“Christ who makes us one calls us to live in justice and peace and impels us to work together for justice and peace in God’s world.”





weakness and poverty, suffering as Christ suffers, that the Church is truly sign and mystery of God's grace. (ii)

12. As servant the Church is called to make present God's holy, loving and life affirming plan for the world revealed in Jesus Christ. By its very nature the Church is missionary, called and sent to witness to the gift of communion that God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the Kingdom of God. In its work of holistic mission - evangelism and diakonia done in Christ's way - the Church participates in offering God's life to the world. (iii) In the power of the Spirit, the Church is to proclaim the good news in ways that awaken a response in different contexts, languages and cultures, to pursue God's justice, and to work for God's peace. Christians are called to make common cause with people of other faiths or none wherever possible, for the well-being of all peoples and creation.
  
13. The unity of the Church, the unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation are interconnected. Christ who makes us one calls us to live in justice and peace and impels us to work together for justice and peace in God's world. The plan of God made known to us in Christ is, in the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ, "things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:9-10)."

*Q/ How might you serve God in creation?*

*Q/ How do you experience the Church as foretaste, as prophetic sign and as servant?*

Notes:

## STUDY 4

### Our commitment

14. We affirm the place of the Church in God's design and repent of the divisions among and within our churches, confessing with sorrow that our disunity undermines our witness to the good news of Jesus Christ and makes less credible our witness to that unity God desires for all. We confess our failures to do justice, to work for peace, and to sustain creation. Despite our failings, God is faithful and forgiving and continues to call us to unity. Having faith in God's creating and re-creating power, we long for the Church to be foretaste, credible sign and effective servant of the new life that God is offering to the world. It is in God, who beckons us to life in all its fullness that joy, hope, and a passion for unity are renewed. Therefore, we urge one another to remain committed to the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches: to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.(iv)
- We affirm the uniqueness of our fellowship and our conviction to pursue the visible unity of the Church together, thankful for our diversity and conscious of our need to grow in communion.
15. In faithfulness to this our common calling, we will seek together the full visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church when we shall express our unity around the one Table of the Lord. In pursuing the unity of the Church we will open ourselves to receive the gifts of each other's traditions, and offer our gifts to one another. We will learn to commemorate together the martyrs who witnessed to our common faith. We will continue theological conversations, giving attention to new voices and different methods of approach. We will seek to live out the consequences of our theological agreements. We will intensify our work for justice, peace and the healing of creation, and address together the complex challenges of contemporary social, economic and moral issues. We will work for more just, participatory and inclusive ways of living together. We will make common cause for the well-being of humanity and creation with those of other faith communities. We will hold each other accountable for fulfilling these commitments. Above all, we will pray without ceasing for the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17): a unity of faith, love and compassion that Jesus Christ brought

through his ministry; a unity like the unity Christ shares with the Father; a unity enfolded in the communion of the life and love of the Triune God. Here, we receive the mandate for the Church's vocation for unity in mission and service.

*Q/ What do you understand by the phrase "full visible unity"?*

*Q/ What do you see as acceptable diversity and what do you see as unacceptable diversity in the quest for Christian unity?*

*Q/ Which of the commitments mentioned here do you see as the greatest challenge facing you as an individual, facing your church, and facing the ecumenical movement today and in the future?*

Notes:

## 16. We turn to God, the source of all life, and we pray:

O God of life,  
 lead us to justice and peace,  
 that suffering people may discover hope;  
 the scarred world find healing;  
 and divided churches become visibly one,  
 through the one who prayed for us,  
 and in whom we are one Body,  
 your Son, Jesus Christ,  
 who with you and the Holy Spirit,  
 is worthy to be praised, one God,  
 now and forever. Amen.

- i We pray that as our churches respond to the Faith and Order document, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* we may be helped to understand more of the visible unity that God calls us to live in and for the world.
- ii We gratefully acknowledge the many programmes of the WCC that have helped us to understand what it means to be a faithful community where divisions of ethnicity, race, gender, power and status are being confronted and overcome.
- iii We are thankful for all we have learned through the Decade to Overcome Violence about just peace in God's way focused in *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace* from the Jamaica Peace Convocation; and all we have learned about mission in God's way, encapsulated in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism document, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*.
- iv The Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches as amended by the 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006; III: Purposes and Functions. We remember the words of the First WCC Assembly in 1948, 'Here at Amsterdam we have...covenanted with one another in constituting this World Council of Churches. We intend to stay together.'



## Appendix

### The Message of the 10th Assembly

#### Join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

*By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.  
Luke 1:78-79*

Dear Sisters and Brothers, we greet you in the name of Christ.

1. We gathered in the Republic of Korea at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (30 October – 8 November 2013). Coming from 345 member churches of the fellowship and from partner organizations in the ecumenical movement, we joined in prayer, shared stories from our local communities and took to heart strong messages of agony and hope. We are thankful for the many engaging statements released. Our common pilgrimage traced the theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.”
2. In the city of Busan, we journeyed together on a road of transformation – we pray that as we are being transformed ourselves, God will make us instruments of peace. Many of us travelled to other parts of Korea where we witnessed the open wounds of a society torn by conflict and division. How necessary is justice for peace; reconciliation for healing; and a change of heart for the world to be made whole! We were encouraged by the active and committed churches we encountered; their work bears bountiful fruit.
3. We share our experience of the search for unity in Korea as a sign of hope in the world. This is not the only land where people live divided, in poverty and richness, happiness and violence, welfare and war. We are not allowed to close our eyes to harsh realities or to rest our hands from God's transforming work. As a fellowship, the World Council of Churches stands in

solidarity with the people and the churches in the Korean peninsula, and with all who strive for justice and peace.

4. God our Creator is the source of all life. In the love of Jesus Christ and by the mercy of the Holy Spirit we, as a communion of the children of God, move together towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom. Seeking grace from God we are called, in our diversity, to be just stewards of God's Creation. This is the vision of the New Heaven and Earth, where Christ will "fill all in all" (Eph 1.23).
5. We live in a time of global crises. Economic, ecological, socio-political and spiritual challenges confront us. In darkness and in the shadow of death, in suffering and persecution, how precious is the gift of hope from the Risen Lord! By the flame of the Spirit in our hearts, we pray to Christ to brighten the world: for his light to turn our whole beings to caring for the whole of creation and to affirm that all people are created in God's image. Listening to voices that often come from the margins, let us all share lessons of hope and perseverance. Let us recommit ourselves to work for liberation and to act in solidarity. May the illuminating Word of God guide us on our journey.
6. We intend to move together: Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we challenge all people of good will to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions.

This Assembly calls you to join us in pilgrimage.

May the churches be communities of healing and compassion, and may we seed the Good News so that justice will grow and God's deep peace rest on the world.

*Blessed are they who observe justice,  
who do righteousness at all times!  
Psalm 106:3*

*God of life, lead us to justice and peace!*



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