



For action

GOD'S CALL TO UNITY AND OUR COMMITMENT

Creation is a gift from the living God. We celebrate creation's life in its diversity and give thanks for its goodness (Gen. 1). 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

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 discovery, 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 suffer from HIV/AIDS and other epidemics; peoples are displaced and their lands dispossessed. Women are victims of abuse and inequality. 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 they dishonour God's gift of life.

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 a new, unprecedented 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 and closer fellowship. 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.

But 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 and new issues bring sharp challenges creating new divisions within and between churches. Too easily we withdraw into our own traditions and communities, without being challenged and enriched by the gifts others hold out to us. For some, the creative new life of faith seems not to 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.

As those with human failings, 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.

Our shared scriptural vision

As we read the Scriptures together our eyes are opened to the place of the community of God's people, the Church, 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 and 28). The covenant with Israel marked a decisive moment in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. The prophets called 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).

God sent Jesus Christ who through his ministry and through his death on the cross destroyed the walls of separation and hostility, established a new covenant, and brought about genuine unity and reconciliation in his own Body (Eph.1: 2: 10; 14-16). Jesus announced the coming Kingdom of God, had compassion on the crowds, healed the sick and preached good news to the poor (Matt. 9:35-36; Luke 4). 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 17:21). 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 2:34).

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). God is always there ahead of us, always surprising us, forgiving our failures and offering us the gift of new life.

God's call to unity today

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.

As foretaste God gives to the Church gracious gifts: a faith grounded in Holy Scripture; baptism in which we are in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and made a new creation; 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; synodical and conciliar gatherings too are gifts enabling the fellowship, under the Spirit's guidance, to discern consensus,

to teach together and to live sacrificially, serving one another's needs and the world's needs. Unity 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.¹

As prophetic sign the Church's vocation is to show forth the life 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, for example, ethnicity, race, gender, disability, power, status, and caste 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 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 weakness and poverty, suffering as Christ suffers, that the Church is truly sign and mystery of God's grace.²

As servant the Church is called to make present God's holy 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 service, evangelism and mission done in Christ's way, the Church participates in offering God's life to the world.³ 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 live in the presence of peoples of other faiths, and are called to make common cause, wherever possible, for the well-being of all peoples and creation.

Christian unity, the unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation belong together. They are inseparable. Therefore, the search for unity requires and leads to the search for justice and peace.

Our commitment

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

¹ 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 God calls us to live in and for the world.

² 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.

³ We are thankful for all we have learned through the Decade to Overcome Violence about just peace in God's way; 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*.

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.

And so we urge one another to remain committed to “the primary purpose of the fellowship 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.”⁴

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 other traditions, and offer our gifts to them. We will continue theological conversations, giving attention to new voices and different methods of approach. 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. Above all, we will pray without ceasing for the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17): a unity of love and compassion that Jesus Christ brought through his ministry: a unity like the unity Jesus shared 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.

We turn to God, on whom we depend 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

⁴ *The Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches* as amended by the 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006; III: Purposes and Functions.