

The Arusha Call to Discipleship

13 March 2018

World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship

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The World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism met in Arusha, Tanzania, from 8-13 March 2018. More than one thousand participants—all of whom are engaged in mission and evangelism—gathered from many different Christian traditions and from every part of the world.

We joyfully celebrated the life-giving movement of the Spirit of God in our time, drawing particular inspiration from African contexts and spiritualities. Through Bible study, common prayer and worship, and by sharing our stories together, we were encouraged to be witnesses to the reign of God that has come to us through the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Despite some glimmers of hope, we had to reckon with death-dealing forces that are shaking the world order and inflicting suffering on many. We observed the shocking accumulation of wealth due to one global financial system, which enriches few and impoverishes many (Isaiah 5:8). This is at the root of many of today's wars, conflicts, ecological devastation, and suffering (1Timothy 6:10). This global imperial system has made the financial market one of the idols of our time. It has also strengthened cultures of domination and discrimination that continue to marginalize and exclude millions, forcing some among us into conditions of vulnerability and exploitation. We are mindful that people on the margins bear the heaviest burden.

These issues are not new for 2018, but the Holy Spirit continues to move at this time, and urgently calls us as Christian communities to respond with personal and communal conversion, and a transforming discipleship.

Discipleship is both a gift and a calling to be active collaborators with God for the transforming of the world (1Thessalonians 3:2). In what the church's early theologians called "theosis" or deification, we share God's grace by sharing God's mission. This journey of discipleship leads us to share and live out God's love in Jesus Christ by seeking justice and peace in ways that are different from the world (John 14:27). Thus, we are responding to Jesus' call to follow him from the margins of our world (Luke 4:16-19).

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

We are called by our baptism to transforming discipleship: a Christ-connected way of life in a world where many face despair, rejection, loneliness, and worthlessness.

We are called to worship the one Triune God—the God of justice, love, and grace—at a time when many worship the false god of the market system (Luke 16:13).

We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ—the fullness of life, the repentance and forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life—in word and deed, in a violent world where many are sacrificed to the idols of death (Jeremiah 32:35) and where many have not yet heard the gospel.

We are called to joyfully engage in the ways of the Holy Spirit, who empowers people from the margins with agency, in the search for justice and dignity (Acts 1:8; 4:31).

We are called to discern the word of God in a world that communicates many contradictory, false, and confusing messages.

We are called to care for God's creation, and to be in solidarity with nations severely affected by climate change in the face of a ruthless human-centered exploitation of the environment for consumerism and greed.

We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities, in our quest for unity and on our ecumenical journey, in a world that is based upon marginalization and exclusion.

We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where the politicization of religious identities often causes conflict.

We are called to be formed as servant leaders who demonstrate the way of Christ in a world that privileges power, wealth, and the culture of money (Luke 22:25-27).

We are called to break down walls and seek justice with people who are dispossessed and displaced from their lands—including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—and to resist new frontiers and borders that separate and kill (Isaiah 58:6-8).

We are called to follow the way of the cross, which challenges elitism, privilege, personal and structural power (Luke 9:23).

We are called to live in the light of the resurrection, which offers hope-filled possibilities for transformation.

This is a call to transforming discipleship.

This is not a call that we can answer in our own strength, so the call becomes, in the end, a call to prayer:

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of life in all its diversity and beauty. Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, we praise you that you came to find the lost, to free the oppressed, to heal the sick, and to convert the self-centred. Holy Spirit, we rejoice that you breathe in the life of the world and are poured out into our hearts. As we live in the Spirit, may we also walk in the Spirit. Grant us faith and courage to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus: becoming pilgrims of justice and peace in our time. For the blessing of your people, the sustaining of the earth, and the glory of your name. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/the-arusha-call-to-discipleship>