



Geneva, 16 June 2023

Message of greetings at the 16th General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches from Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, general secretary of the World Council of Churches

Respected Moderator,
Respected President and Vice-President of the Conference of European Churches
Respected Secretary General of the Conference of European Churches,
Your Eminences, Your Excellencies,
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), I wish to convey the hopes and prayers of the full fellowship of churches for your deliberations. It is a real joy for me to convey these greetings to the 16th General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches gathered in the city of Tallinn, Estonia, exploring the theme "Under God's blessing – shaping the future." I was so much longing to be with you in person but I had to attend the memorial service of the WCC Former Moderator, Dr Agnes Abuom, in Nairobi, Kenya, but I am with you in thought and in spirit.

The WCC is especially thankful for the contribution that you, as European churches, offered to the worldwide fellowship of churches that gathered in Karlsruhe last year for the WCC 11th Assembly.

As affirmed in the Unity Statement of the assembly, we turned "to celebrate and affirm the ways in which the quest for a true unity is always founded in love: the love of God revealed in Christ and lived in the Holy Spirit, a love that moves us, and moves the world, to reconciliation and unity."¹

Despite many difficulties on the way that led to our gathering in Karlsruhe, the WCC 11th Assembly made clear the deep commitment to the goal of visible unity, and a renewed focus on ecumenical spirituality and on ecclesiology that begins with baptism.

There is a real, increasing convergence about the need to hold together the local and the universal in thinking about the Church, along with an evangelical passion for proclaiming the gospel together and sharing in the mission of God to the world.

What do Europe's churches have to offer today? This question is in your hands.

¹ WCC 11th Assembly Unity Statement: <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/A05rev1-Unity-Statement.pdf>

However, as we look back at the vital ecumenical contributions that you have already made and still make to the life, well-being, and future of the European churches and all of Europe, it is my hope that this assembly will help to continue to shape the role of your churches as reconciling communities in such a challenging time as the one we currently have in the region.

The churches' role in bringing unity and peace—particularly as we address the Russian invasion of Ukraine—is crucial. Only by keeping a collaborative dialogue open can we as churches seek unity amongst ourselves—and then actually work towards seeking peace in the context of Ukraine and Russia. As we face these complex issues, let us face them together.

You have, as the WCC has, repeatedly condemned and deplored the illegal and unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine. As we work toward the end of the war and toward the unity of the Orthodox churches and all believers, let us pursue peaceful solutions together. And, together, let us ask what God has called us to do. Apart from peacemaking and unity, Christians are called to be salt and light in the world as we hold out hope and life in Christ to a struggling and broken world. In the midst of a climate emergency, declining churches in some places and a number of global challenges, we continue to remain faithful and obedient to proclaim Jesus Christ with humility, grace and love.

May God give you strength to stay together and be able to spread and sustain a view of justice, peace, freedom, and responsibility.

In the words of the WCC 11th Assembly, “we have used many words, but from these we have fashioned a new resolve. Now we ask God’s assistance to transform our commitments into action. We commit ourselves to working with all people of good will. (...) We invite all to become pilgrims together. For in Christ, all things will be made new. His love which is open to all, including the last, the least, and the lost, and is offered to all, can move and empower us in a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity.”²

In this spirit, I pray that your discussions may prove fruitful for the future of Europe’s churches and society. Wishing you a successful and inspiring assembly, I remain yours in our common Lord Jesus Christ,



Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

² WCC 11th Assembly Message: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/message-of-the-wcc-11th-assembly-a-call-to-act-together>