



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

11-13 November 2022

DOCUMENT 14

Title	World Council of Churches General Assembly Report		
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For information		
Assembly or ASC Minute	Not applicable		
Consultation			
Purpose	To provide a report on the World Council of Churches General Assembly held in Karlsruhe Germany, 29 August – 9 September 2022.		
Rationale & Findings Summary			
Attachments			
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receive the World Council of Churches report.2. Request the General Secretary to investigate the possibility of the Assembly achieving a Gender Status Card, and including Break the Silence Sunday in the calendar for 2023.3. Request the President, in consultation with Congress, to work with UnitingWorld, Church Partners in West Papua and the Pacific Conference of Churches regarding possible advocacy to the Australian Government for West Papua.		
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WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES REPORT

The Uniting Church is a member of important global ecumenical bodies – the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the World Methodist Conference, the Pacific Conference of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia and the Global Christian Forum. The Assembly holds membership in these bodies on behalf of the Uniting Church, also funding the membership fees.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a fellowship of 352 churches from more than 120 countries, representing over 580 million Christians worldwide. It met in Germany in August-September this year for its 11th General Assembly which occurs every 8 years, with the theme, "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity". The President and the General Secretary were the two Uniting Church delegates to the General Assembly, and Mark Kickett the Interim Chair of UAICC attended as an Advisor. Also attending from the Uniting Church were Emily Evans (WCC Executive Committee member, Consensus Decision Making Advisory Team member), Tara Curlewis (Visitor), Amelia Koh Butler (visitor, World Methodist Council Executive member) and Marie Wilson (Visitor).

Uniting Church delegates and participants also attended a gathering of United and Uniting Churches, and the 200th anniversary of the United Church in Karlsruhe and Baden.

With 880 delegates from the member churches, as well as advisors, observers and visitors, approximately 4000 people attended the event. The logistics were amazing, and it was heartening to see that even with this large number of attendees and an extensive venue site for meetings, plenaries, business, worship and a side festival event (think fringe festival!), attention was still paid to accommodating all people for maximum accessibility and the environmental footprint of the event as a whole.



ASSEMBLY THEME

The Assembly theme came to the gathering amidst great global uncertainty – climate change, economic inequality, gender discrimination, racism, and war – and it was explored throughout the Assembly through many of the lens of these challenges. In presenting the theme, the WCC noted:

In this fragmented and fractured world, the assembly theme is an affirmation of faith that Christ's love transforms the world in the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Against the powers of destruction and sin, the assembly theme affirms that the love of the compassionate, crucified, and risen Christ is at the heart of the world. It is a radical call to the churches to work together unceasingly and with people of other faiths and all those of good will for just peace and reconciliation. It is a call for the visible unity of the church to become a

prophetic sign and a foretast of the reconciliation of this world with God, and the unity of humankind and all creation.

PRE-ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

Prior to the General Assembly, four Pre-Assemblies were held over two days – Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (ADAN) Pre-Assembly, Ecumenical Youth Gathering Pre-Assembly, Indigenous Peoples Pre-Assembly and the Just Community of Women and Men Pre-Assembly.

Mark attended the Indigenous Peoples Pre-Assembly at the invitation of the WCC and also participated in a panel discussion which considered *Restoring Wholeness in Creation: Indigenous cosmology and religion*.



Sharon and Colleen attended the Just Community for Women and Men Pre-Assembly. There were key discussions on issues of gender justice and gender violence, and equality; as well as the work that the WCC had done over the past nine years in this area. Sharon spoke to the meeting of the importance of language for people of all genders and how even the title of this pre-assembly was problematic. This was well



received and resulted in a change in language from that point on. Thursdays in Black (TIB) was also a feature of this meeting, and three patches for the TIB Waterfall Project were presented.

Two opportunities for the work of the Assembly were identified during this Pre-Assembly – the use of the Gender Status Card developed by the Pacific Conference of Churches
(<https://www.pacificconferenceofchurches.org/pacific-gender-status-card-safe-just-pacific-communities-for->

[women-and-men/](#)) and the promotion of Break the Silence Sunday (<https://breakthesilencesunday.org/what-we-are-about/>).

The work from the Pre-Assemblies resulted in statements that were reported to the delegates of the General Assembly and will be considered in the ongoing work of the WCC over the coming eight years.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly was a rich ecumenical experience. We participated in a daily rhythm which included worship and prayer, thematic plenary gatherings, business sessions, home groups and ecumenical conversations. Home groups provided an opportunity for smaller groups of delegates, approximate thirty delegates, to reflect on the Assembly and its work, and to share together and get to know each other and learn from each other. Sharon was a Home Group leader.

The President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, travelled to Karlsruhe to address the Assembly; as did other regional government leaders.

All sessions were simultaneously translated into English, German, Spanish, French and Indonesian

Worship and Prayer

Worship and prayer began and ended the day under the prayer tent (brought to the Assembly from the Tokyo Olympic Games) in many languages and styles of worship. The music offered times of joy, dancing, reflection and deep contemplation. Sermons spoke to the theme and scripture. Ritual gave voice to issues of the heart and culture.

The resource for spiritual reflection was entitled, [Oasis of Peace](#). It acknowledged that as participants came to Karlsruhe, we would come seeking an oasis of peace, 'where we can refresh, renew, and perhaps reform our spirit and our churches through fellowship, encouragement, earnest discussion and deliberation and ... through shared, common prayer.'



Thematic Plenaries

Five thematic plenary sessions were held throughout the Assembly. These sessions focussed on particular themes which were explored in a variety of ways. In these sessions, global church leaders also addressed the meeting.



The plenaries focussed on the following themes:

1. The Purpose of God's Love in Christ for the Whole Creation – Reconciliation and Unity : this plenary took place on 1 September, the Day of Creation. It celebrated the purpose of God's love in Christ for the whole creation. Moved by the compassion of Christ's love, Christians are to repent and transform what is broken with acts of justice and peace, healing and compassion. It also included an Intergenerational conversation about the theme.
2. Europe Plenary : Contemporary Europe faces many diverse challenges with global consequences, include the war in Ukraine's which has affected peace and security in the region, and created a refugee crisis and a global humanitarian food and energy crisis with direct consequences for the world's poorest people. Focussing on the parable of the Good Samaritan, it included a discussion on the churches' diakonal response, and the sharing of hopes for peace, reconciliation and unity by young delegates.
3. Affirming the Wholeness of Life : Affirming the wholeness of life and the compassion of Christ who is the light of the world, this plenary challenged indifference and systemic injustice. Compassion is embodied by seeing listening and turning to those who are excluded, marginalised and oppressed. The plenary lifted up voices from the margins that point to the light of Christ and inspire compassionate and transforming discipleship.
4. Affirming Justice and Human Dignity : This requires a radical impatience with practices that foster the sin of systematised, structural inequality and abuse. Transforming discipleship is expressed through practical acts of love, and must begin with the recognition of our complicity in encouraging, normalising and perpetuating injustices.
5. Christian Unity and the Churches' Common Witness : This plenary invited us to reflect on what Christian unity means today and the new horizons for the mission of the church; and to examine the quality of our ecumenical companionship and togetherness on our common journey in Christ.

Ecumenical Conversations

Delegates, advisors, observers and participants (visitors) participated in 23 ecumenical conversations over five days. These ecumenical conversations again allowed more intense focus on important issues. Outcomes from these conversations were presented to the General Assembly delegates, and will form the foundation for the work of the WCC over the coming eight years.

Sharon provided leadership as the rapporteur to the ecumenical conversation considering *Human Mobility and Displacement and the Public Role and Witness of the Church*. Migration and/or human mobility in its varied forms not only pose specific challenges concerning human rights. The conversation explored the tensions and intersections between human rights and Christian faith, and the churches' pastoral, prophetic and public role. It also considered the changing and extremely diverse profiles of people on the move, the challenges migration raises and the many ways migrants transform ecclesial life, mission and praxis.

Business Sessions

Business sessions were held each day of the General Assembly and used consensus decision making as the basis for how it did its work. Jill Tabart took the Uniting Church's meeting processes to the WCC and worked with current General Secretary of the Methodist Church in NZ, Tara Tautari, who was then on the WCC staff to assist in the WCC transitioning to consensus. Daily training was provided to delegates about how the process would work in the General Assembly meeting.

While there were elements of how we use consensus, it was also impacted by the large number of delegates, the different interest groups hoping to influence decisions, and the committee structure of the WCC that took place as the General Assembly met and whose work impacted the business of the Assembly. We were intrigued by the addition of the green card, that was used to vote on particular issues where a majority was required.



Business considered by delegates included endorsing statements from Pre-Assemblies, amending the rules of the WCC receiving the work from the ecumenical conversations; and the report of the Finance Committee and other Committees; elections for various committees including the Central Committee and other matters.

Amongst the key statements the Assembly approved were Public Statements [on Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples](#), [Confronting Racism and Xenophobia](#), [Overcoming Discrimination](#), [Ensuring Belonging](#), [The Living Planet: Seeking a Just and Sustainable Global Community](#) and on [Ukraine](#) and [the Middle East](#). And minutes on [ending the war on the Korean Peninsula](#) and [West Papua](#). These statements and minutes can provide guidance to the Uniting Church as we continue to work on these key issues. These statements and minutes along with the reports from the pre-gatherings and ecumenical conversations will guide the priorities of the Central Committee and the staff of the WCC.

The main governance body of the WCC is the Central Committee, made up of 150 members taken from nominations from member churches. A smaller Executive Committee is elected from the Central Committee as are the three Moderators of the WCC. Sharon was nominated by member churches from Australia and was elected to the Central Committee for the next eight years.

Every Assembly of the WCC has released a message to convey the experience of the Assembly and the inspirational nature of its work. The 11th General Assembly released the message, *A Call to Act Together*, at the conclusion of the Assembly. (<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/message-of-the-wcc-11th-assembly-a-call-to-act-together>)