Pilgrimage to Busan
An Ecumenical Journey into World Christianity

God of life, lead us to justice and peace

World Council of Churches
10th Assembly
30 October to 8 November 2013
Busan, Republic of Korea
Jesus commanded his followers to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Today the good news of Jesus Christ has found its way to every continent and island. Though very different from each other, believers in each place participate in ministries of truth-telling, community building, service to others, dialogue with neighbours, and commitment to the establishment of a just peace throughout the world.

This resource is an invitation to people in congregations to discover at the local level a deeper sense of what it means to be a part of that global church — the body of Christ interconnected throughout the world in diverse contexts.

The New Testament speaks of God’s reign over the oikoumene, a Greek word meaning “the whole inhabited earth.” This term is the origin of the English words “ecumenism” and “ecumenical,” having to do with the quest for unity among all Christians and their churches.

In modern times, the ecumenical vision has become one of restoring unity through dialogue and solidarity in Christian witness and service. We hope that in your group, your reading and reflection, your explorations, you engage in a journey of understanding described in the following pages. We hope that in your group and your community you can join in grassroots experiences of, and participation in, the ecumenical movement as a worldwide renewal movement that reframes Christian discipleship to meet today’s most pressing needs.

One of the instruments of the ecumenical movement of our time is the World Council of Churches (WCC), the global fellowship of Christian churches, founded in 1948. The 10th Assembly of the WCC is to be held in the autumn of 2013 at Busan, Korea, and this event has provided the occasion for developing this resource. (For a video overview of past WCC assemblies, see http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/videos/wcc-general/an-overview-of-the-9-assemblies-of-the-wcc.html) But, rather than focus on the processes and programmes of the WCC itself, the resource invites you to engage the deeper spiritual impulses and current emphases of the ecumenical movement and thereby to accompany the churches’ journey to Busan.

The six units of this resource — or “station” stopovers along our journey — are intended as localized points of entry into each discussion focus. They each begin with an encounter with Christians in a different part of the world and with the questions, challenges, themes that they raise for us as Christians in our own communities. We hope that your engagement with these sites of solidarity enables you to live out the assembly theme: “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.”
Jesus prayed, “I ask … that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17: 20-21). Unity among Christian believers is what God wills; continuing divisions are real wounds to the church as the body of Christ.

1. What are some ways in which the lack of Christian unity is apparent in your community? How are Christians divided from one another? How does this affect their witness to the gospel and their working together in the community?

“We need each other because it is only together that we can grow into the one body of Christ.” (Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the WCC, addressing 2012 meeting of Pentecostals)

2. How are Christians visibly coming together in your community? How has this changed over the years? What obstacles still remain?

“When we talk about unity, it doesn’t mean to change somebody’s faith. It means to sit together, to share, to love each other and to accept each other.” (Deaconess Agnes Simbo Lema)

3. How has getting to know other churches better affected your sense of what it means to be church? How can we be enriched by or learn from our differences?
“Christians are called not only to work untiringly to overcome divisions and heresies but also … to foster legitimate diversities … in such a way that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole.” (Church 2012, #30)

4. How can we risk becoming more vulnerable, open to receiving what the other offers us, different ways of viewing life, the faith, and living out the faith locally and globally?

“We are called to be ecumenical people…. The Holy Spirit isn’t waiting for official ‘OKs’ from church bodies to get their members to worship, learn with, and grow with other churches…. People expect churches to compete with and criticize one another, even to fight. When we work together we show a different understanding of Jesus.” (Jane Jebsen)
The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. If it does not engage in mission, it ceases to be church.

1. Is your church “burning” for mission?
   How, or why not?

Mission is not a project of expanding churches (or numerical growth) but of the church embodying God’s salvation in this world.

2. How does this notion of mission counter some popular understandings of what mission is about?

Jesus calls us out of our narrow concerns into a larger vision. The Holy Spirit empowers us to go “to the ends of the earth” as witnesses to God’s justice, freedom and peace in each context of time and space.

3. How has the Spirit led you into new sites of encounter and struggle, and transformed you, or your congregation, in the process?
Those on the margins in a society may be able to see what is less obvious to those in centres of power. Through struggles in and for life, the marginalized hold forth what God wants in the world, while also being carriers of the active hope, collective resistance, perseverance and action needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.

4. Who tends to be at the margins in your church and/or community — because of their race/ethnicity, class, age, gender, or other condition? What are their priorities for the well-being of all? How does this affect the mission priorities of your church?

The gospel takes root in different contexts through engagement with specific cultural, political and religious realities. The gospel is liberating and transformative. In its proclamation, cultures may be transformed and more just and inclusive communities created.

5. What aspects of your culture or way of life especially need to be liberated and transformed by the gospel?

Today we live in a world dominated by an excessive assertion of religious identities and persuasions that seem to break and brutalize in the name of God, rather than to heal and nurture.

6. How can we become channels and not obstructions, so that the good news flows like water that heals, restores, and refreshes all?
Living with people of different faiths has been the everyday reality for Christians in some parts of the world for centuries, even millennia (as in Asia and the Middle East). However, today this has become an increasingly common reality throughout the world, including in countries considered to be pervasively Christian but where changes and new tensions have arisen in recent years.

1. **How are people of other faiths received in your community?** What suspicions or obstacles do they experience? Are there ways you have cooperated with people of other faiths on issues or projects in your community? What have you learned from this? On what common concerns might you collaborate in the future?

The ecumenical movement has been addressing this for some decades, in various efforts — to understand the faiths and realities of others, to dialogue with those of different faiths, and to collaborate and work together with them to address human needs and further the common good. Increasingly this is on the ecumenical agenda — for the sake of unity not only with Christians, but with all people.

2. **Learning and discussing what those of other faiths actually believe and practice is an essential further step.** How have you learned (informally and formally) about other faiths? What has been your experience of actually discussing with persons of other faiths what they believe and practice? How could conditions for such encounters be made more inviting?
Interreligious encounter also has raised new questions and insights into what Christian self-identity means, and for how mission and evangelism should be carried out in our multicultural and interreligious world.

3. How have discussions (or dialogue) with persons from other faith traditions provoked you to think in new ways about how you understand the Christian faith? What questions or insights into your self-understanding as a Christian have these encounters raised? What have you experienced as some of the challenges for bearing witness to your faith among people of other faiths?
One of the deepest and widest streams in the Bible is the call for justice.

1. What biblical passages come to mind when you think of God’s intention for justice?

2. What realities of poverty, excessive wealth, and environmental damage do you see in your own community?

Poverty, wealth and the destruction of creation are deeply interconnected and profoundly spiritual problems. Unlimited pursuit of profit and wealth too often occurs at the expense of the poor and of damage to the land, water and air needed to sustain all of life.

3. Discuss examples of how these are connected — in your own as well as other contexts. How could these be addressed together?

4. What are some of the common ways people ignore, rationalize or interpret these crises?
“The Holy Spirit enlivens and equips the Church to play its role in proclaiming and bringing about that general transformation for which all creation groans. (cf. Rom. 8:22-23)” (Church 2012, #21)

5. Do we believe that the power of the Holy Spirit actually is active in and through us, so that we might play a part in transforming these injustices?

6. Why is it so difficult to work for justice?

7. What are you already doing, or what could you be doing, as a congregation to further God’s justice?
Prayer takes us more deeply into the world.

1. How does praying bring us into solidarity with others who are suffering and distant from us? Do we really want God to take us there? How might this transform how we see and relate to the conflicts in the world today?

Jesus said, “My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). Thomas Merton said that as long as we see other human beings as those to be feared, mistrusted, hated, and destroyed, there can be no peace on earth.

2. How can we distance ourselves from a climate of fear in order to experience the peace that Jesus gives?

In the midst of their suffering and oppression, Palestinian Christians raise up the importance of faith and hope, and advocate nonviolent practices of love toward those oppressing them.

3. How are situations of conflict and violence transformed through the faith, hope, and love we experience through Jesus Christ? How are you involved in advocacy, or could be, especially with regard to Israel/Palestine?
“Love of neighbour” and practices of forgiveness can break the patterns of enmity and spirals of retribution and revenge present in our communities and world today.

4. What are some examples of where this has occurred or needs to occur?

The 2011 International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (www.overcomingviolence.org) focused on violence in families and communities, violence in how we relate to the earth, violence in economic life, and violence among peoples. Participants called for just peacemaking in all these arenas.

5. Within this broadened scope, where do you especially feel the need for peacemaking?
Transformative spirituality is not just about what we do, but about how God transforms us — in community with others — and sends us forth as disciples.

Through the power of the Spirit, as we see and connect with those most different from ourselves, we are transformed. Christ chooses our neighbors for us — including those who are quite unlike us, socially, ethnically, where and how we live — and connects us to them, in a communion or fellowship that transcends time and space and every other boundary.

1. How do you feel connected with Christians from other parts of the world? How might this transform how you understand God, worship, your sense of the church?

2. How has interacting with those from much different contexts enabled you to see “reality” differently, and to become motivated to do something about injustices?

3. How might church practices, such as the music sung, the Word proclaimed, and the sacraments celebrated, form people to challenge injustice, and thus become “subversive” of injustices present in your own and other settings?
Instead of being self-sufficient churches, we are interrelated:
instead of our strength or know-how, our vulnerability;
instead of an urge to tell or show others, a genuine openness
to listen and learn from others.

4. How does this challenge some of the usual assumptions
or stances of churches/congregations?

We have been on a journey, touching base with examples
of some central emphases characteristic of the ecumeni-
cal movement — the “boat, train or plane” — as it travels
toward the assembly of the World Council of Churches in
Busan, Korea. But this journey, fueled by the Holy Spirit, is
a deeply spiritual movement. It is a movement of transfor-
mative spirituality that leads toward discipleship in and for
the world.

5. What does that mean or imply for you now? How
does the God of life lead us to justice and peace, wherever
we are? What implications does this have for our concrete
lives and discipleship?

6. What would you like to communicate to those who
will be gathering at the 10th Assembly of the WCC in
Busan?