

Report of the World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian unity. It is a visible manifestation of the prayer Jesus prays for his disciples as recorded in the Gospel of John:

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 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).

The WCC brings together 352 churches, denominations, and church fellowships in more than 120 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 580 million Christians and including most of the world’s Orthodox churches, numerous Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. While the majority of the WCC’s founding churches were European and North American, such as the Church of the Brethren, today most member churches are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific.

For its member churches, the WCC is a unique space—one in which they can reflect, speak, act, worship, and work together; challenge and support each other; share and debate with each other. As members of this fellowship, WCC member churches:

- are called to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship;
- promote their common witness in work for mission and evangelism;
- engage in Christian service by serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation; and
- foster renewal in unity, worship, mission and service.

In an address to the Central Committee, Dr. Ioan Sauca, interim general secretary, noted that the WCC is more than a faith-based institution; at its heart, the WCC is a spiritual-based institution. While one might think this is a matter of theological nuance, it is in fact a profound statement. Often, faith-based institutions are seen as non-governmental organizations focused on relief work, with an implied static nature to the work and direction.

Saucu drew out attention to the Holy Spirit. As a spiritual-based institution, the WCC represents a dynamic process of change as we seek to invest all God has given us to meet the needs of the world. The dynamism that comes from the Holy Spirit opens our work, worship, and life to the possibilities of what God is doing and can do with and through God’s church. Thus is the work of the World Council of Churches.

Central Committee and Appointments of Leadership

The global pandemic prevented the Central Committee, the chief governing body of the WCC, from meeting in person. Since a new general secretary must be selected during an in-person meeting of the Central Committee, the contract of the interim general secretary was extended twice.

The Central Committee did meet via videoconference for abbreviated meetings in June 2021 and February 2022. Jeff Carter, Central Committee member, serves on the governance committee, which approves and appoints delegates, advisors, and leadership for the Assembly and offers oversight on constitutional issues.

Brethren and the WCC

The Church of the Brethren is a founding member of the World Council of Churches and has had representation since 1948. Two notable Brethren representatives are M. R. Zigler and Donald Miller.

Miller, former general secretary of the Church of the Brethren General Board, was one of the leaders and architects of the process that began with Peace Among the Cities and led to the Just Peace movement and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. Today, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace advocates on behalf of those who are experiencing violence and injustice. This year's focus was Africa. In the fall of 2021, both the pilgrim team and the Commission of the Churches for International Affairs visited South Africa.

Zigler, who was Brethren Service coordinator in Europe and founder of On Earth Peace, was known for his speeches. He called on the WCC to maintain a focus on peace and reconciliation, and challenged member churches to “A modest proposal for peace: Let the Christians of the world agree that they will not kill each other.”

With Brethren presence and influence, the World Council of Churches maintains a strong biblical peace focus and its programs often have an impact on Brethren around the world. One example is the WCC concern for peace in Nigeria:

“Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and criminal kidnapers have continued to commit crimes and atrocities against the people of Nigeria for over a decade,” said Sauca. The WCC “calls on the international community to offer every possible support and assistance to the Nigerian authorities and people to bring an end to the killings, kidnappings and looting, to restore security, and to enable Nigeria schoolchildren to go to school without fear and the people of Nigeria to carry on their lives and livelihoods in safety and dignity.”

Because of its international presence and connection to both governments and nongovernmental organizations, the WCC can advocate with civil authorities and coordinate communication among NGOs. In Nigeria, this work directly affects our brothers and sisters of EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria.

Green Village

The WCC is making progress on Green Village, a development of its site in Geneva that has a goal of achieving a One Planet Living label. Each Green Village building will bear the name of a key international treaty in sustainable development: Kyoto, Montreal, Rio, Lima, Durban, and Stockholm. Currently under construction are Kyoto, the first office building, and Montreal, a residential building.

The construction respects the standards set by the One Planet Living label, with priority given to construction materials from the local economy and to recycled materials from existing structures. Buildings will be powered by renewable energy, through photovoltaic solar panels and networked energy. The goal of zero waste will be reached via an onsite eco-center and through the policy of waste reuse put forward by the local municipality.

11th World Assembly

With the theme “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity,” the council is preparing for the 11th World Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. The major gathering was postponed from 2021 because of the pandemic, and will now be held in August 2022. Meeting every eight years, the Assembly draws together member churches, ecumenical partners, and other churches from around the world.

Church of the Brethren representatives to the World Council of Churches are Elizabeth Bidgood Enders, delegate, and Glenn Bollinger, alternate. Jeff Carter is a member of both the Central Committee and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

David Steele, general secretary
Elizabeth Bidgood Enders, delegate
Glenn Bollinger, alternate
Jeff Carter, Central Committee member