

Archbishop Justin today addressed the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The WCC Assembly is the highest governing body of the World Council of Churches, and normally meets every eight years. This years conference took place between 31st August - 8th September 2022. It is the only time when the entire fellowship of member churches come together in one place for prayer and



Churches is "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and

Albin Hillert/WCC 2022

Archbishop Justin was speaking as part of the closing plenary session and his full speech can be read below.

We are in a time of world crisis and in this time of world crisis we found ourselves meeting, at the end of July and early August at the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, which was called 'God's Church for God's World', and strangely the themes of that meeting almost exactly overlapped with the themes of this meeting. During it, we had the benefit of remarkable speeches from Ecumenical guests.

Two, I will pick out especially, one was from Dr Anne Burghardt, who with great generosity broke into her summer holiday to speak to almost 700 Anglican Bishops and 500 spouses. She spoke above all of visible and organic unity, with deep theological and emotional impact. The second was by Cardinal Tagle who spoke on the subject of the next 10 years, he is the Cardinal who leads under the Pope's leadership on evangelisation. He emphasised the urgency of the dangers that face us, and the greatness of the task of evangelisation at every level, for only in the conversion of human beings is found the hope of new global community.

So we met, a lot of us, not all, we sadly missed some who felt they could not be there, and the themes we concentrated on were conversion of life, clarity of vision and honesty about the differences that we have between us. The conference had had three main aims, to renew our love for Christ, to define our solidarity with one another, to refresh our commitment to serving the *missio dei*, the mission of God, in God's world. There was a lot more than that, of course.

The Anglican Communion reaches from the hills and mountains of Papua New Guinea to the canyons of Wall Street, the vast majority are global south, in conditions of poverty, persecution or war and that means and that hindrances to unity are no less in the Anglican Communion than in the Global Church or in this wonderful gathering which I feel so privileged to be invited to address. Of course, the public comment tended to focus only on human sexuality, what else is there to talk about when the world is in such crisis but we spent one hour in plenary over 11 days on that subject, the rest of the subjects were those that are in this world of crisis.

In that time of talking about human sexuality and the work behind the scenes we had huge differences cultural and theological, scriptural, scientific. We found our way forward through, not by solving the issues but by living in the light of Christ, by saying we do not agree, by being honest without excluding one another.

Our experience amidst our differences could have been summed up in the opening remarks of this WCC by the Moderator, Dr Agnes Abuom that very remarkable opening speech she said "Absolutely fundamental to the WCC and the ecumenical movement are relationships. That's what makes experiences like the assembly so precious and formative. We encounter one another – in all our uniqueness – and recognise a neighbour in the stranger, unity in the midst of our diversity."

And in this time of world crisis we found a way forward, not in panicking in what is happening around us but in studying the scriptures, in prayer and even by the end of the conference by sharing Communion far more than we were the eucharist at the beginning. At the beginning many felt they could not participate, by the end almost all did.

The theme of the conference was the first letter of Peter. We began to love one another fervently from the heart (1 Peter 1:22, 1 Peter is the Conference text). Being together as part of God's people and reflecting on God's world renewed our sense of the great creation of a new people that is the theme of the letter, a people whose nature is holy, a royal priesthood, God's own people who have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

And, the challenge to us as Christians is in daily conversion of life to use one of Benedict's expressions, we are to declare God's wonderful works, to give expressions to the reasons for our hope, to be beware of the danger of slipping into old ways and of the dangers that come all around us.

We found afresh in this time of crisis, the grace of God and the Grace of each other and that grace is needed even more intensely now because we are in a world of crisis. Whether it is Ukraine, ISIS, Syria, the threat to Middle East Christianity, debt, inflation, hunger and climate change; all these are since our last meeting in 2013 and mean there are wars and rumours of wars. The next decades look no better, economically, militarily, spiritually, socially, scientifically, technologically, especially for the poorest and the weakest.

In this time of world crisis, Christians are to be a community of peace, the creation of God, not us, in Christ through the Spirit. We are to be a people of generosity and harmony across difference that testifies to the world, that says to the world "we have met and believed in the Lord, and are blessed with a blessing we share" (John 20 and 1 Peter 2:9-10).

I believe that times of great world crisis and they are greater today than perhaps ever before in human history, say to all of us, the time of ecumenical winter and the habits of division, of living separately, is past. New life will come with obedience and the choice of us taking risks in ecumenism, that step forward expecting to be blessed when we obey Christ.

We live amidst the ecumenism of suffering, where Christians are killed all round the world for being Christian, never asked which church they belong too. Are you an Anglican? No, are you a Christian?

We are well practised in the ecumenism of service. Theological understanding has advanced greatly. But none of us are yet imbued with the spirit of the love of Christ. Christ's prayer for visible unity to convert and draw us close enough to each other, although not united, we share as one people in the paschal mystery. But we do not show that day to day.

What is visible, organic unity? Like those at the empty tomb we do not yet know our individual or collective future with Christ. Unlike them we do know the world's future without Christ. The luxurious expense of well-practised Christian division is no longer affordable.

And in this time of world crisis I find hope that even Anglicans can come together because God is even bigger than the mistakes of the ABC.

My simple challenge to all of us today, is to re-find the spiritual passion of the past for ecumenism; theologically, in solidarity with the suffering, in love that covers a multitude of sins. To do that we must face our fears of each other and of the world together, we must love one another, we must give common witness and work towards a more visible unity that we reimagine in the grace of God.

For it is in the attributes of God that we see unity. Katherine Sonderegger's recent Systematic Theology in her first chapter of volume one sets this out beautifully.

The world crisis must not be allowed to continue while the world church remains divided. At Pentecost God created a single new people. At the last day, Christ Pantokrator will come to judge us. We will have no answer to his judgement if we permit such a failure in this age of our divisions, such a failure in this age of climate change which threatens literally billions of our fellow human beings, of war and possible nuclear war.

We will have no answer to God, no answer except, we were used to being divided. We are called to offer our obedience to the prayer that there may be one in humility. And so, in that spirit of honesty I must say that after 9.5 years in this role I feel a deep sense of failure and shame on my efforts in the ecumenical area and before you I want to commit myself now and with you I pray and hope to seek afresh the future unity to which we are all called, not a unity of identity but a unity of diversity in the richness of God's creation and in that and towards that and with that, may God give us courage, joy, love and peace. Amen

7 min read

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