

Consultation on
Transformative Ecumenism - Life with Justice and Dignity for All
Organised by the Council for World Mission in partnership with the All Africa Conference of Churches
at Desmond Tutu Conference Centre, Nairobi, Kenya
17-19 August 2023

MESSAGE

Around 60 people, including church leaders – lay and clergy, women and youth—theologians, Christian social activists, and representatives of civil society organizations from twenty-seven countries in Africa and the world gathered in Nairobi to reflect further on the meaning and implications of Transformative Ecumenism. As an attempt to reimagine ecumenism in response to the palpable fragility characterizing the contemporary global landscape, [Transformative Ecumenism](#) proposes new ways of understanding and living out ecumenism in the 21st century. This message was adopted at the public launch event on August 19, 2023, following a two-day consultation and an encounter visit to Kibera, a Nairobi slum that is considered one of the largest informal settlements in Africa.

“Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”. Amos 5.24

The backdrop of Africa’s vast and complex political, economic, social and religious realities and the awareness of the diversity, complexity and global nature of Christianity helped us to understand afresh the demands of the gospel promise of life with dignity and justice for all. Our gaze shifted from the realm of the privileged to the crucible of the marginalized. We made ourselves conscious of the many threats to life, such as wars and war economies, economic injustice, right-wing ideologies, climate crisis, debt bondage, forced migration and human trafficking, and violent extremism. Consequently, we explored resistance, advocacy and partnerships as possible responses, proclamation as speaking truth to power, witness as transformative presence and discipleship as a vocation of active hope. We asserted that Christian unity is covenanting for justice and peace so that God’s promise of life for all becomes a reality. We were convinced that people-based, justice-driven and transformative expressions of Christian presence and participation are crucial to live out this mandate. We acknowledged that Transformative Ecumenism offers such possibilities, echoing the prophetic call for a spirituality of life, catalyzing both critical and creative endeavours toward a world where life flourishes, justice prevails, and dignity is ensured for all.

Our time and conversation with the people and their accompaniers in Kibera, vindicated our resolve and commitment to confront the forces of marginalization and to accompany those resisting the same through creative and collaborative actions for change. Further, it challenged us to discover the church afresh as a catalyst, a participant and an agent of audacious hope and transformation amidst life-denying adversities.

Therefore, as we covenant to be together in Transformative Ecumenism, we commit ourselves to:

Advocate for justice and dignity for all of God’s creation, asserting that these are pivotal for the realization of the promise of abundant life for all. We recognize the potency of our collective yearnings for life, subjugating the forces of death, and commit ourselves to actions that encompass speaking truth to power, resisting injustice, and offering hopeful alternatives to the world's death-dispensing paths.

Decolonize, liberate, and restore the oppressed oikumene of the past and present empires. We recognize the urgent need to move away from Eurocentric attitudes and responses to the diversity and complexity of the present world order. By denouncing greed, domination, discrimination, and exploitation manifesting in diverse forms and spheres of life, we strive for a world guided by the values of love, respect, justice, mutuality, interdependence, and an organic bond with nature.

Dismantle hierarchies within communities and churches in the manner of Jesus our Lord who asserted his ministry as one that ‘serves rather than lords over’ and aligned with the victims of hierarchies. This indicates initiating and nurturing respectful, inclusive, and participatory ways of being church.

Reject the margins-creating centers, and instead affirm the agency and visions of those who are marginalized and are resisting the forces of marginalization as our pathfinders.

Engage with young people by embracing their innovative and alternative visions of the world, and opening spaces for their leadership and participation. We also recognize the need to nurture intergenerational collaborations.

Ensure the active involvement of women in all aspects of church ministry and leadership. We assert that the church is called to be and to effect just and inclusive communities.

Collaborate with individuals and communities of all faiths and ideologies to work toward a future that enables the flourishing of life for all. This also implies partnering with civil society organizations to advocate for democratic politics and equitable, inclusive and sustainable economic policies.

Acknowledge those knowledge systems and people’s traditions that uphold and nurture the sanctity of life and the integrity of God’s creation. We assert that theological education must be in the service of the transformation of the world rather than the ritual and institutional edifices of the church. We commit ourselves to working with our theological institutions to formulate curricula that align with the core concerns of Transformative Ecumenism.

We reiterate that the challenges of this moment in time require reimagining ‘ecumenism as a new awareness of the interconnectedness of life, an alternative vision of the world, a movement of assembling partners for justice, and a passionate vocation that inspires creative changes toward a world that ensures life with justice and dignity for all. Such an understanding of ecumenism is transformative because it insists on the need to be transformed and to effect transformation as a way of participating in God’s mission for the world’.