



# World Council of Churches

NordKom 2015

## Session I: **Local** becomes **national** becomes **global**

Stockholm, Sweden, 26 August 16:00–18:00

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Dear colleagues,

It's an honour and pleasure to represent the World Council of Churches in Stockholm today. It's exactly 90 years ago since August 1925 when Nathan Soderblom organized the First International Conference on Faith and Work (or "Practical Christianity"), an ecumenical gathering in Sweden with 700 participants from all over the world. Through his initiatives for an organized ecumenical movement, particularly through the great and unprecedented meeting in Stockholm, Nathan Soderblom opened a new chapter in the history of the churches and their common witness in the world. He was instrumental in planning the institutional embodiment of the ecumenical movement, which later became the WCC.

In 1930, in Oslo, he was rewarded the Nobel Peace prize for his initiatives to make the fellowship of churches a movement for justice and peace. That was a significant recognition of the way in which the churches together can contribute something toward just peace in the world. It reminds us of the potential and duty to continue doing this in our time.

Nathan Soderblom was born in Trönö, in 1866. He served in local, regional and national and global capacities.

## **The fellowship**

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. The WCC brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 500 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. At the end of 2013, there were 345 member churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American; 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.

## **Communicare – to share**

The perennial goal of the WCC Communication Department is to raise the profile and impact of the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC). This is done through a variety of means which reflect its core Christian and ecumenical values. The communication team shares stories and promotes WCC programme activities in order to educate, inform, and gain support for the WCC within a broad international audience, including the WCC member churches, governing boards, and public at large.

The programmatic objective is defined in this way:

*The WCC is an effective communication actor and a platform for sharing stories and voices from member churches and ecumenical partners working together in the pilgrimage of justice and peace, and raising the fellowship's visibility and public role.*

### **That programmatic objective is articulated through four strategic goals:**

- Raising the profile and impact of the WCC;
- Training and support of staff in communications work;
- Strengthening the member church communications network;
- Participating in efforts to develop the WCC's financial resources.

**For 2015, the goals are being pursued through four strategies:**

**WCC as catalyst for change** – building the reputation of the WCC through its leadership and the fellowship of member churches among decision makers in church and society. This collaboration makes certain that through various communication platforms the WCC voice reflects the values and perspectives of the WCC and the ecumenical movement. The platforms include:

- Publications – journals, academic trade publications, policy series;
- Media relations;
- Website and social networking;
- Public speaking and leadership engagement.

**Advocacy and making a difference** – this is a timely focus on issues that target and activate the grassroots' involvement in particular issues of concern to the WCC and its member churches. This focus is meant to work collaboratively with programmes and member churches to make certain their initiatives include a proper communication strategy, audience selection, as well as activation platforms. The communication platforms include:

- Staff training to be better communicators;
- Website presence and social networking;
- Use of electronic media (i.e. video, audio, etc.);
- General trade publications and congregational resources;
- News and feature articles (storytelling);
- Media relations;
- Fundraising initiatives as appropriate.

**Building the fellowship** – a key component of the WCC's role in building the fellowship is the potential to share the work of member churches when their efforts converge with WCC programmatic work and values. This sharing, in itself, is also an opportunity to enhance awareness amongst the member churches of the value of the WCC's role in building the fellowship. Much of the sharing is accomplished in collaboration with WCC programmes and the member church communicators. The platforms include:

- Networks in the regions
- News and feature articles about member church work;
- Website features;
- Joint communication initiatives with member churches.

**Resource development, promotion and WCC branding** – an expected outcome of the communication focused work and points of internal and external collaboration is increased opportunity for resource development, promotion, and branding of the WCC. This work is a primary point of collaboration between communication and IMD. The platforms include:

- Institutional messaging and visual identity disciplines;
- Promotional materials – brochures, displays, annual review, videos, etc.;
- General trade publications – Just Peace series, etc.;
- Marketing WCC communication products;
- Media relations and monitoring;
- Website and social media.

## **Facing challenges**

The World Council of Churches is a fantastic organization. It is truly a hub that brings together more than 345 member churches and 500 million Christians the world over. I can see a number of challenges that need to be tackled within it.

The WCC must identify its role in the communication landscape. We must not take on the role or tasks of member churches; we must not compete with regional or confessional players, but we should rather collaborate with them and support them. We are not a news agency; we are a partner of the member churches and organizations and an advocacy player! We need to seek our global role in a regional context. We need to have the courage to focus and limit our work in order to reach people.

We need to work more efficiently in terms of resources. We need a clear **communication strategy** that states the focus of our communication over the next years.

Communicating about church activities is something above and beyond the ordinary and must be conducted with great respect for the gospel; however, this does not prevent us from using terms and strategies from the business world. These practical strategies represent a means to achieve our goal.

## **Communication for all**

The Christian tradition affirms that God invests all of humankind with freedom and dignity, and that God stands especially with the oppressed and marginalized, working through history for their liberation. God desires that all people may be enabled to learn from and interpret their own reality.

In my work I use inspiration from the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). The WACC promotes communication for social change.

We believe that communication is a basic human right that defines people's common humanity, strengthens cultures, enables participation, and creates community.

WACC's key concerns are media diversity, equal and affordable access to communication and knowledge, media and gender justice, and the relationship between communication and power. It tackles these through advocacy, education, training, and the creation and sharing of knowledge.

### **WACC has articulated seven guiding principles:**

- Communication is a spiritual exercise
- Communication builds and shapes community
- Communication enhances participation
- Communication promotes freedom and demands accountability
- Communication celebrates cultural diversity
- Communication builds connectedness
- Communication affirms justice and challenges injustice.

See more at: <http://www.waccglobal.org/who-we-are/our-organization/principles#sthash.L9hz9YQk.dpuf>

In light of the above principles, and believing that communication embodies respect for the dignity, integrity, equality, and freedom of all human beings and their communities, we recognize communication rights as inherent in all other human rights.

Communication rights claim spaces and resources in the public sphere for everyone to be able to engage in transparent, informed and democratic debate. They claim unfettered access to the information and knowledge essential to democracy, empowerment, responsible citizenship, and mutual accountability.

They claim political, social and cultural environments that encourage the free exchange of a diversity of creative ideas, knowledge, and cultural products. Finally, communication rights insist on the need to ensure a diversity of cultural identities that together enhance and enrich the common good.

Communication for All affirms the centrality of communication – including mass, community, and social media – in strengthening human dignity and in promoting democratic values and social justice. In particular, the principle of “communication for all” restores voice and visibility to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in a spirit of genuine solidarity.

Communication promotes freedom and demands accountability in many communities, and the incorporation of emerging communication technologies into daily life multiplies voices while creating spaces where those who have been silenced and made invisible may address grievances. Communities use these technologies, together with more traditional media, as powerful tools with which they can demand accountability and celebrate their particular identities. In both rural and urban communities, information and communication technologies are being used to keep in touch with friends and family, creative self-expression, commerce, accessing global culture, networking, and advocacy.

The existence of information and communication technologies, on its own, does nothing to guarantee that the media serve truth and the common good, nor that everyone will be assured access to media platforms. Left to their own devices, media monopolies, allied with politicians, often engage in deception and manipulation to consolidate and preserve their own power. Such actions are an affront to human dignity and undermine personal freedom.

In today’s world, communication must be lifted up as a fundamental human right and communicators called to practice an ethics of freedom and accountability. Freedom of expression must be respected and community groups assured access to technology and to media platforms. Educational curricula must include media literacy programmes. This is especially important in times of rapid social and technological change when traditional cultures need to develop constructive strategies for engaging external cultural influences. Together, such principles assure that a diversity of voices and images remain before the public and that the public can develop healthy criteria for discerning how those voices and images may contribute to the common good.

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in which freedom of information falls under the right to freedom of expression. Article 19 states: ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.’

## Let's be concrete and join the pilgrimage of justice and peace!

The 10th assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, Korea, in November 2013, called on you and all people of good will: "Engage in transformative action." In this sense, the 10th Assembly continued the reflection and the prayers of the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2006: "God in your grace, transform the world!" However, in the 10th Assembly we said something more. The message, reflecting on the theme "God of life, lead us to justice and peace!", concluded with the succinct and clear call: "Join us in a pilgrimage of justice and peace!"

To strengthen relationships and support churches in Latin America in their struggles for justice and peace, a pilgrimage of church leaders organized by the WCC visits Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Colombia from 24 August to 7 September. Read about the WCC Pilgrimage to Latin America: <https://www.oikoumene.org/.../church-leaders-to-embark-on-a-p...>

I'll use some paragraphs from the speech by the WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit in Argentina yesterday. *"The pilgrimage of justice and peace is a spiritually grounded transformative journey. It combines spiritual dimensions of prayer and worship and practical action for justice and peace. Focusing on justice and peace, we affirm the values that need to guide us on the way of transformation as signs of God's reign to come. We are reminded that Christian life and identity are part of something greater than ourselves, something which binds us together in solidarity with each other as an expression of God's grace and love. "*

The pilgrimage has a number of basic aspects. A pilgrimage can contribute successfully to justice and peace in our world only when and if it is able to:

- strengthen the fellowship of churches being prepared to walk together;
- be engaged together in effective public witness for justice and peace;
- encourage one another in spirituality, theological reflection, and formation while participating in the pilgrimage;
- build relations of trust and understanding with others, "all people of good will", working for justice and peace; and
- communicate inspiringly and innovatively about work done together as churches in and for the world.

## **Examples:**

- **EAPPI – interview with Dr Anna Hjälms, Jerusalem**
- **On the road to Paris and COP21 – interview with Eva-Maria Reinwald, Ev. Kirche von Westfalen, Dortmund**
- **South Sudan**
- **Korean Peninsula**

Let's continue the work in the spirit of Nathan Söderblom. I'll use words from his prayer:

"Lord, be before us to guide us, be behind us to push us, be beneath us to carry us, be above us to bless us, be around us to protect us, be in us so that in body and soul we serve you for the glory of your Name."