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God's Kaleidoscope

Hope Makers: From Hostility to Hospitality

A Newsletter from the International and Ecumenical Conference on Racial Justice

3.0



Hope Makers: From Hostility to Hospitality

A Pertinent theme for such a time as this

The theme “From Hostility to Hospitality” highlights a critical movement in contemporary racial justice discourse. Hostility—expressed through prejudice, exclusion, and systemic inequity—functions not merely as interpersonal tension but as a structured social condition shaped by historical narratives and power relations. Recognizing that such hostility is constructed rather than inevitable opens space for transformative intervention.

Hospitality offers an alternative framework. Far beyond gestures of welcome, it denotes an intentional ethic of recognition, reciprocity, and shared belonging. This ethic acknowledges historical harm while fostering new possibilities for equitable relationships and inclusive communities.

“Hope makers” are the agents who facilitate this transition. They engage in deep listening, challenge oppressive structures, and cultivate practices that enable mutual dignity. Their work underscores that racial justice requires not only the dismantling of harmful systems but the active construction of healing social spaces.

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It is in this context the Conference is exploring further the theme Embracing Diversity, Reexamining Democracy and Challenging hostility.

Hartmut Rhein, the Commissioner for Churches, Religions and Worldview Communities, greeted and encouraged the Conference.

The Rt Revd Arun Arora, the Bishop of Kirkstall, and a lead Bishop for Racial Justice. The current Wind of change is blowing away bridges that build common life. The kind of nationalism we are experiencing today is hardedged and whippes up. The ill wind is also seen in both church and Society. Let us stand firm and resist the bitter wind. Let us face the storm with courage, and let us not fail to act.



Sathianathan Clarke Calls for Love-Rooted Belonging Amid Global Violences

This love is defined by Jesus' new commandment (John 13:34):

"Love one another as I have loved you."

Only where this love is enacted can God dwell.

The Spacious Triune God and a New Way of Belonging

Clarke's central takeaway:

Believing in a spacious God leads to a new way of belonging to one another—demonstrated by behaving in the way of love.

John 14:1–7, often misunderstood as exclusivist, is framed as a reassurance for early Jewish-Christian communities questioning their path. Clarke emphasized that "I am the way" refers not to religious exclusion but to the way of love, embraced through "triple believing" in Father, Son, and Spirit.

The Spirit of Truth and the Paraclete: Diversity, Justice, and Public Witness

Clarke explored John's unique portrayal of the Holy Spirit as:

- Spirit of Truth — guiding communities into "all truth," exposing forces of injustice, and drawing diverse peoples (Greeks, Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles) into a community shaped by love.
- Paraclete (Advocate) — defender of the vulnerable, voice for the voiceless, and unifier of a new family not based on race, ethnicity, or privilege but on belonging through love.

The Johannine Pentecost, he noted, lacks dramatic signs but is embodied in the disciples' movement into the world as defenders of the oppressed—the true mark of being Spirit-filled.

Love as Public Action

Clarke highlighted John's ethic of love through Jesus' identity statement:

"I am...what I have done." (John 13:12–13)

Jesus' foot-washing becomes the defining act of divine love—incarnational, humble, and justice-bearing.

A World Vision for Today

With global politics marked by hostility, exclusion, and nationalist violence, Clarke concluded that John's Gospel offers a counter-vision:

- Belief in a spacious, room-making God
- Belonging to one another across boundaries
- Behaving in self-giving love, especially toward "the oppressed, rejected, and orphaned of the world."

This, Clarke argued, is the Jesus way—a public witness of love strong enough to confront untruth, resist domination, and shape a just world.

Communications Team:

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Photography: Andreas Weise

In a powerful Bible study session, Professor Sathianathan Clarke connected the Gospel of John to today's global context marked by violation, violence, and widespread despair among common people. He noted that contemporary society is increasingly shaped by Mammon, where wealth overwhelms the worth of human beings and the wellbeing of the planet. Clarke warned that violence has become the public face of religions, that religious extremism is entangled with illiberal nationalism, and that muscular Christian nationalism is gaining ground in the Western world.

Historical Background of the Gospel of John

Clarke situated the Gospel of John within its late first-century context (90–110 CE), highlighting factors that shaped its unique narrative—Greek philosophical influence, Roman ethnoreligious tensions, and a maturing Christian community reflecting on Jesus after several decades. This contributes to John's high Christology, including the distinctive "I Am" sayings that echo Yahweh's self-revelation in Exodus 3:14.

The Gospel's prologue—"the Word (Logos) became flesh"—sets a Greek-influenced theological frame for understanding Jesus. Clarke outlined John's three-part salvation story:

1. Jesus leaves his heavenly home (John 1:1–18).
2. Jesus dwells among humanity, offering life "on earth as in heaven" (John 2–19).
3. Jesus returns to his heavenly home, while the Spirit remains to accompany believers (John 20–21).

Reversing Expectations in John 14

Focusing on John 14, Clarke noted a striking reversal. Jesus first speaks of preparing an eternal home "in my Father's house." Yet later in the chapter, Jesus declares that the Father and the Son will come and make their home with the disciples (John 14:23).

Heaven is not only a future hope—it is a present reality wherever love is lived.

This love is defined by Jesus' new commandment (John 13:34):

"Love one another as I have loved you."

Winds of Change: Christian Voices in Politics Panel from Berlin Examines Democracy in a Fractured World

Berlin: A thought-provoking panel discussion titled "Winds of Change: Rethinking Democracy in a Fractured World – The Costly Struggle to Uphold Democratic Values" brought together leading Christian voices to reflect on the role of the Church in contemporary politics.

The session, moderated by Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, explored how faith communities can respond to rising global tensions and democratic backsliding. Bishop Bedford-Strohm guided a deeply engaging conversation that highlighted both challenges and opportunities for Christian engagement in public life.

The distinguished panelists included:

Prelate Dr. Anne Gidion, Representative of the Council of the EKD to the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Union. Dr. Silke Lechner, Deputy Commissioner for Churches, Religion and Worldview Communities at the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion, and a member of the Council of the EKD.

Both speakers shared insights from their extensive experience at the intersection of governance, society, and faith. They emphasized the Church's responsibility to contribute to democratic resilience, promote dialogue, and support social cohesion.

The discussion underscored the continuing importance of Christian perspectives in shaping political discourse—especially at a time when democratic values are increasingly tested.



Democracy at the Crossroads:

Duncan Dormer Calls for Hope Over Fear Amid Rising Global Populism

In a major address titled “Democracy at the Crossroads: Choosing Hope Over Fear,” Duncan Dormer warned that liberal democracy faces an unprecedented crisis driven by a global surge in populism, deep cultural shifts, and a rapidly changing world order.

Dormer described a growing “storm” marked by populist narratives pitting “pure people” against “corrupt elites,” the rise of leader-centric politics, erosion of moral and legal norms, and intensified identity-based divisions. Democratic institutions—from universities to civil services, cultural sectors, and even churches—are increasingly targeted, while global networks of populist movements amplify each other through emotionally charged communication styles. Beneath this turbulence, Dormer identified a deeper geopolitical “swell”: the decline of Western hegemonic power and the emergence of a multipolar world shaped by civilizational states such as China and India. He argued that today’s turmoil represents a crisis not of democracy itself but of liberal democracy—a tradition rooted in the Enlightenment, universal moral equality, meliorism, and resistance to ethnonationalism.

Dormer noted that Christianity historically contributed to shaping the global political order and continues to influence both liberal democratic ideals and populist movements. He urged Christian leaders and communities to resist the co-option of religious symbols by nationalistic agendas and instead strengthen societal “middle ground” by addressing real grievances without fuelling polarization.

He called for a renewed political theology, a bold articulation of the vision of God’s Kin(g)dom, and a morally grounded commitment to mutual responsibility in public life. Dormer emphasized the need to rebuild self-esteem, narrative identity, and mutual recognition within communities, supported by just institutions that fairly distribute rights, duties, opportunities, and honour.

Bishop Arun Arora calls to resist the bitter wind. In a moving presentation Bishop Arun Arora Bishop of Kirshall pointed out that the image of the blowing wind is often associated with Holy Spirit. But the winds of change we are witnessing now is not the work of the Holy spirit. Referring to the drastic cut in the resourcing of the Racial Justice programme by the Arch Bishop council, he pointed out that we are moving from “action back to lament”. For him control and compassion are the defining elements of migration. Every migrant is not an enemy. We should be able to welcome, promote, protect and integrate refugees. He called for a voice for the overlooked and ignored. Our call is not only to show mercy but also to love our enemies. Amidst the cacophony of division and hatred, we must resist the bitter wind. He openly said that within the corridors of decision making there are powers that block movement towards justice.



Faith Leaders Call for “Bridges, Not Walls”



A distinguished gathering of faith leaders, scholars, and activists convened for a panel discussion titled “Bridges, not Walls: Building Common Ground in Divided Times,” focusing on the role of religious communities in promoting peace, justice, and reconciliation amid deepening global divisions.

Moderated by Professor Dr. Klaus Schaefer, the panel brought together respected voices in interfaith dialogue and public witness, including Professor Dr. Azar Karam, Dr. Masiba Gunda, Mrs. Anete Adelman, and Reverend Guy Hewitt. Each offered insights drawn from their work across religious, cultural, and social contexts, addressing the urgent need for collaboration in addressing shared global challenges.

Faith Communities as Catalysts for Peace

Panelists reflected on the responsibilities of faith communities in a fractured world. Speakers underscored that building bridges requires not only goodwill but also concrete, often costly commitments — whether financial, social, or personal. They called for an active engagement across traditions, stressing that solidarity and service must extend beyond theoretical support.

One contributor highlighted the deep connections between various forms of discrimination, noting that racism, religious intolerance, gender inequality, and environmental degradation are intertwined and must be confronted collectively. “If we wish to serve everyone, we must address everything that dehumanizes,” he said.

Confronting Injustice and Historical Realities

Masiwa Gunda contributed a pointed reflection on the need for authenticity in dialogue and social action. He warned against performative gestures that promise bridge-building but fail to deliver substantive change, recalling a story of a political leader who pledged to build bridges yet left communities waiting. He emphasized the dangers of the epistemology of ignorance — societal tendencies to overlook or sanitize historical truths about colonization, enslavement, and systemic inequality. Genuine peace, he argued, requires a willingness to confront these histories and acknowledge past complicity.

Decolonial Approaches and Reparative Work

The discussion also explored the importance of decolonial ecumenical dialogue, urging faith communities to adopt models of communication that center honesty, inclusion, and reparative justice. Panelists emphasized that repairing historic harms is essential for any sustainable reconciliation effort.

Mrs. Anete Adelman, General Secretary of the International Council for Christians and Jews, spoke about the realities of Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations in times of conflict. She highlighted ongoing challenges in combating antisemitism and navigating the impacts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on interfaith dialogue, stressing that maintaining communication remains both vital and difficult during crises.

Interconnected Crises Demand Integrated Responses

Throughout the conversation, panelists reiterated that global injustices — from climate disruption to racism to the marginalization of religious minorities — cannot be addressed in isolation. They called for humility, courageous truth-telling, and a commitment to listening rather than debating.

The session concluded with a shared affirmation that the work of justice and reconciliation is at once material and spiritual, requiring societies to value equality, inclusion, and the dignity of all people. Participants agreed that real bridges are built not by words alone, but through actions that honor historical truth and cultivate genuine common ground.



Bishop Henrich Bedford-Strohm, the Moderator of the World Council of Churches, presented the Living Planet Monitor (LPM) a flagship WCC publication from its Land, Water and Food justice programme to the Racial Justice Conference. He invited the participants to read the well researched publication, that is focused on Africa. Dinesh Suna, the editor of the LPM, reminded participants that racial justice and environmental justice are deeply intertwined, as the people of colour disproportionately bear the burden of environmental degradation. When racial justice and ecological justice are pursued together, they strengthen each other, creating pathways toward a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

A Special Thanks to Tanya Krenner for Outstanding Conference Support

A heartfelt acknowledgment was extended to Tanya Krenner, whose patience, dedication, and seamless coordination proved vital to the successful logistics of the conference. As the primary contact at the Evangelische Bildungsstätte auf Schwanenwerder, Tanya played an indispensable role in ensuring that every detail—from the initial venue booking to the final logistical arrangements—was handled with exceptional professionalism.

The comprehensive conference kit, created through the joint efforts of contributors from around the world, was sent to Tanya in advance item by item. She ensured everything was meticulously prepared and ready for participants at the start of the event.

Managing room allocations and handling inevitable last-minute adjustments are challenges common to events of this scale, yet Tanya approached every task calmly and graciously, always with a warm smile.

The organizers express deep gratitude to Tanya Krenner and her entire team for their exemplary hospitality and unwavering support, which significantly contributed to the conference's smooth logistics.



Voices of Young People



The youth panel discussed their perspectives on the movement from the "I" to the "We". For Prince from Antwerp, creating a safe working environment was crucial. Felix from Norway, including youth in leadership positions is important. Ezekiel from Morocco urged to assign responsibilities to young people. Logan from Netherlands was confident in a few years that the young people will organise the future God's Kaleidoscope. Elise Kallevig spoke about the importance of recovering from racism and reconstructing biases and assumptions. Victoria from Freiburg differentiated between competing interest and finding reasons to work together. Akhil from India spoke of hierarchies becoming inclusive minded. Markus from Sweden mentioned about the vast interest in the church again. The young people raised the question, Is the church ready to accept young people? Grace Fagan Stewart, the Head of Safeguarding moderated the session.

