



**The United Church
of Canada
General Council**

GC45 World Council of Churches Accountability Report for Summer 2025

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The first Central Committee meeting following the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2022 took place from June 21 to 27, 2023, at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland. In addition to the 150 Central Committee members and eight presidents elected in Karlsruhe, advisors and youth advisors from the member churches of the World Council of Churches, as well as ecumenical partners and churches that are not members of the WCC, also participated.

From The United Church of Canada (UCC), Hyuk Cho (member), Michael Blair (advisor), and Brianna Lane (youth advisor) attended. During the meeting, our General Secretary, Michael Blair, was elected as the moderator of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). Additionally, Sandra Beardsall was elected as a member of the Commission on Faith and Order, and Jonisha Lewinson was elected as a member of the Commission on Young People in the Ecumenical Movement. Hyuk Cho (Programme Committee) and Brianna Lane (Governance and Nominations Committee) will serve as the Central Committee member and youth advisor, respectively, until 2030.

Since it was the first meeting, the Central Committee adopted its strategic plan to guide the work of the council until the next assembly in 2030 and a programmatic response to the 11th assembly as a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity. In the background of the plan and response, the WCC acknowledges the current global context as a “poly-crisis:” multiple threats, such as the accelerating climate crisis, war, systemic poverty, racism, gender-based violence, militarization, unprecedented levels of forced displacement, and emerging

technologies including artificial intelligence (AI), create a complex landscape. However, we, as members of the WCC, are witnessing signs of hope as faith communities engage in humanitarian work and trauma transformation. Faith communities collaborating with other organizations continue to nurture and uphold hope amid growing challenges in the world to build sustainable and inclusive communities.

Amid globalization and digitization, traditional theologies face challenges that call for creative, post-colonial approaches and new ways of being church alongside other faith traditions and beyond. The WCC encourages its member churches to strive for peaceful cooperation with individuals of different faiths. In this endeavor, the WCC is urged to develop the “theology of companionship” and the concept of “ecumenical diakonia” (working together for the common good) to enhance coherence in its programmatic work and build bridges between the church and society through diaconal engagement.

I was impressed by the scope of the WCC’s programmatic works to move churches towards visible unity as transforming disciples at a broadening, intergenerational, interreligious common witness table. In this table, our member churches are encouraged to engage in critical theological, missiological, and biblical reflection for decolonizing praxis, reconciliation, unity, common witness, and ecumenical diakonia. The CWME world mission conference will reflect these themes.

After the 11th assembly, the concept of “Ecumenical Diakonia” is frequently referenced during meetings without further explanation. My understanding is that the WCC seeks to facilitate and collaborate with secular, like-minded partners to address the climate and economic crises, regression in human rights respect, peacebuilding and reconciliation, as well as holistic health and healing. The WCC intends to work alongside other faiths and secular groups to confront the urgent issues that threaten us all. While the WCC maintains its ecumenical ethos, it also aims to go beyond its traditional boundaries to engage with those who may not share the same faith but are united by humanitarian concerns. In this new effort, two key theological themes emerge: *diakonia* and companionship. As a contribution to this developing theological inquiry, I authored a book inspired by my late partner, JungHee Park who was a diaconal minister in the UCC, *Decolonizing Diakonia: From Servanthood to Companionship* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2025, forthcoming).

During the meeting, human sexuality was one of the most debated issues. The conversation about human sexuality remains challenging within the ecumenical movement and the WCC. The programme guidelines committee report, adopted by the assembly, states: “The

assembly requests the Central Committee to continue the work of the reference group on human sexuality, particularly to facilitate discussions regarding Conversations on the Pilgrim Way: Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality with member churches and ecumenical partners who are open to dialogue on this topic.” The programme committee also suggests considering the establishment of a reference group on human sexuality considering the ongoing controversial debate within the central committee. Within the WCC, human sexuality continues to be a subject of discussion, despite the challenges, to affirm that all are created in the image of God.

During the meeting, the 75th anniversary of the WCC was celebrated through a Sunday worship service and a plenary session. We, the UCC, have been founding members of the WCC since its inception in 1948. The UCC continually embraces the ethos and vision of the WCC to journey together on a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity. Additionally, the UCC urges the WCC to expand its fellowship with others based on humanitarian concerns. As we, the UCC, plan to celebrate our 100th anniversary in 2025, the WCC will celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea. These two occasions will provide an opportunity for us to reflect on the vision of unity and ecumenism in our time and place. There are now over 50 United and Uniting churches worldwide that have formed the “United and Uniting Churches” of Christian World Communion, which was formally recognized and developed through a series of consultations facilitated by the WCC. To celebrate the United Church’s centennial anniversary with other United and Uniting families in the WCC, *Ecumenical Review*, WCC’s journal, will feature a special issue on this uniting movement. I contributed an article titled “Honouring the Past, Embracing the Future: The United Church of Canada at 100,” which will be available in June 2025.

As a member of the WCC Central Committee, I contribute to the mission and vision of both the WCC and the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). In my capacity as Convenor of the World Council of Churches Relations (WCCR) committee of the CCC, I work collaboratively with Canadian church leaders and colleagues from the National Council of Churches (NCC) in the United States, as well as the North American President of the WCC, the Rev. Dr. Anglique Walker-Smith to promote ecumenical dialogue and joint initiatives. As part of these commitments, I have served on key planning committees for major ecumenical events, including:

- The WCC-NCC gap year ecumenical gathering (November 2024)
- The visit of WCC General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay to Canada (December 2024)

- The Regional Ecumenical Theological Institute (RETI) will open in 2026 and create a summer school-like program to educate future ecumenists in Canada and the U.S.

2025 has been designated as an Ecumenical year in part because of the common Easter of all Christian traditions. The year will see several WCC events take place. (

<https://www.oikoumene.org/news/brochure-highlights-2025-milestones-on-pilgrimage-of-justice-reconciliation-and-unity>).

The Central Committee meeting provided me with an eye-opening experience for learning about the work of the WCC and how to reflect it in the new context of the shifting Christian landscape. As a theologian, I've faced challenges in creating a theological space for decolonization and reconciliation, as well as in finding ways to be a church and practice ecumenism in an ever-changing world.

The next Central Committee will be held from June 18 to 24 in Johannesburg, South Africa. At this Central Committee meeting WCC will launch The Decade for Climate Justice.

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The United Church of Canada Representative to the World Council of Churches Central Committee

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