

## Ecumenical diaconia: sharing God's gifts at all tables



LWF General secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge at one of the panel discussions during the forum on Ecumenical diaconia. Photo: Ivars Kupcis/WCC

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"Maybe through ecumenical diakonia, hence by jointly preparing the tables for the marginalized and hungry, the theologies will emerge among us that will allow us to eventually accept the invitation of Christ to receive and share God's gifts at one table", said Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke, during the Ecumenical Strategic Forum on Diakonia and Sustainable Development. The concept of "ecumenical diakonia" has been a key element of inspiration in the discussions taking place at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in Geneva, Switzerland, between 3-6 October.

Nordstokke advocated for assets-based ecumenical work, an attitude that would bring forward what each partner is already doing best along with a courageous move to be widely open to serve the other.

As he presented the recently launched WCC document "Ecumenical Diakonia" to the forum, Nordstokke explained that the process of developing it was accompanied by a working group drawn from the WCC, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and ACT Alliance.

The document conceptualizes ecumenical diakonia from two perspectives. The first links to a theological understanding of diakonia, based on reflection that seeks to understand diakonia as a dimension integral to the nature and mission of the church; and the second being more practical, describing how churches are engaged in diaconal action across confessional and geographical boundaries.

The text, which is becoming an important tool for churches worldwide to explore entry points between their diaconal work and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), “considers the specific contribution of diaconal agencies; responds to relevant political and social issues in today’s world; provides theological insight; and proposes concrete steps to strengthen the diaconal capacity of the churches in cooperation with their ecumenical partners”, reads the document.

“It is our hope that the process of distribution and reflection on the Ecumenical Diakonia document will help our member churches to have a more comprehensive understanding of how their diaconal work can be in many ways a collaboration on the SDGs”, said Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri, WCC deputy general secretary. “May the shared constructive spirit that dominates the discussions here in Geneva these days also be a sign of hope that would take our churches and partners toward the next level of ecumenical cooperation.”

General secretary of the LWF, Rev. Dr Martin Junge, commended the Ecumenical Diakonia document as it "gives a common ground for all of us and is a good basis to begin the conversation". He referred to the challenge to give this document political traction so as to address questions of structures, processes and agendas to bring different diaconal actors to one table. He acknowledged that in many cases churches and other actors in diakonia and humanitarian work "still have a huge distance between them".

Junge also explored the common challenges that the document makes clear are still on the table. “How do we bring together the grammar of the churches with the grammar of sustainable development goals?”, inquired the LWF general secretary.

Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, general secretary of the ACT Alliance, sees the agenda of Ecumenical Diakonia as an important element to bring partners closer in the work on development. “The ecumenical movement has to explore its potential, and stop going for competition. In such a competitive world as today, we may better come together as one ecumenical movement; otherwise, we are risking being irrelevant”, he said.

“Ecumenical diakonia has to be understood in a way that we complement each other, that builds on the distinctiveness of our organizations and members”, concluded de Faria.

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[Full address of LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Martin Junge at the forum on Ecumenical diakonia](#)