



## God's Kaleidoscope 2.0 Conference Statement



### “All of Us or None of Us”



## Redesigning the Ecumenical and Inter-faith landscape for a Racially Just, Radically Inclusive and Healing Community

The Statement from the International and Ecumenical Racial Justice Conference, Bad Boll, Germany, 5-7 December 2024

- ☒ **We share a dream:** That no person shall be judged by outward features, but that all people shall be seen as children of God, Our Father, in all their diversity part of one human family.
- ☒ **We share a hope:** That God's love will enable us to see our own shortcomings in making this dream come true, repent of our failures towards those in need of our solidarity and transform our lives from preserving our privileges to sharing our place at the table.
- ☒ **We share a commitment:** That we will ceaselessly work to form a communion of faith in which this vision can start to become a tangible reality for everyone, celebrating together the splendour of God's creation and the colourfulness of our community.

From 5th – 7th December 2024, Christians from the Church of England, in particular the Diocese in Europe, the Racial Justice Unit, the wider Anglican Communion, partner churches and organisations, in particular EKD, WCC and USPG, as well as other Christian Churches and personalities from neighbouring faiths worldwide, gathered at Bad Boll, Germany, to hold a conference on racial justice, as a follow up to a first conference held at Freiburg, 9th – 11th November 2023.

We based our discussions on the Conference Statement adopted at Freiburg, to which we subscribe. Also, the theme 'All of Us or None of Us' has been taken from that first conference. We see these visible links as a symbol of us being part of a continuous process within our churches, building on what has been achieved so far and taking on board new persons and perspectives as we continue our pilgrimage towards a racially just world.

Thus, in this second conference, we took up and further developed the discourse on how our churches can become facilitators of change towards a racially just community, both within our own ecclesiastical structures and in the societies that we are a part of. The focus of our discussion was on how we can move from vision to mission, from dreaming to delivering, from talking to each other to walking together on a path of effective action. In using the term 'racial justice', we are aware that talking of 'race' is continuing a racist interpretation of the different ethnic and cultural backgrounds which together make up the one human race and family. Our aim is to overcome such language of division and replace it by a language of unity, but in order to be understood by others we accept, for the moment, the conditional use of this terminology.

With this in mind, the Conference adopted the following Statement:

### I. Allowing God to be part of the process

A justice that acknowledges equal dignity of all and gives equal opportunity to everyone is not a mere social concept. While we accept that one does not need to be a believer, let alone a Christian to endorse this concept of justice, for us it is deeply rooted in our faith. That is why we blame a lack of faith for many injustices we encounter in our churches and in our societies. We appreciate that the same can be said for believers of neighbouring faiths, who share the notion that all humanity is created equal by God and must, therefore, be treated equally by all.

We are convinced that, as Christians, we need to closely examine our theological and exegetical traditions for signs of misconception and abuse.

Only a Bible liberated from a twisted, warped understanding, driven by human hunger for power over others, rather than by a readiness to submit to God's will, can liberate us. Reading and understanding Scripture must not silence us but make us ask the right questions and question our way of seeing and treating each other.

You cannot believe that God has created all humanity in God's own image and at the same time justify discrimination on the grounds of arbitrary characteristics like the colour of one's skin, the ethnicity of one's parentage, or other outward features owed to birth or fate. Equal treatment, respect and dignity are the birth rights of every child of God. We are requested by our creed not only to abstain from xenophobia, but to practice xenophilia. We are called upon to celebrate our diversity as part of God's good creation. We therefore reaffirm that racism and indeed any other forms of discrimination are a sin and to make up religious or other justifications for such attitudes is heretical.

We base this theological judgment on an understanding of sin that does not merely look at the character of the deed, but also at the intention behind it. If a person's concern is only with themselves, even a seeming act of charity could be sinful. To sin, in this understanding, means to be bent into oneself rather than to reach out to the other for the other person's sake. Real encounter, open for the chance of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation, must always start with being able to see our fellow human beings eye to eye, and not asking for what might be in it for oneself.

In condemning sin, we do not condemn the sinners, but rather emphasise their need of redemption. Sinners are as much victims of sin as those that suffer from their deeds. The process that we envisage for our churches is a process of healing, from which all who are ready to truly engage in it, and honestly repent of their sins, and who are themselves able to feel the pain they have caused and make amends, can emerge as intact and complete. Churches can become communities of healing to one another and to others.

### II. Providing a safe space for exchange and encounter

Therefore, for our churches to become agents of change, we first need to create spaces in which people can tell and face the truth. Our two conferences in Freiburg and in Bad Boll are examples of this. This will not come cheap but will cost us courage and patience and energy. We need to overcome our fears of each other, trusting that the truth will, in the end, liberate both those who have been oppressed and those who have had a part in the oppressing. But before such liberation is possible, we need to be open to give room to pain, expose ourselves to hurt, and accept the free flow of tears.



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In demanding this radical openness, we are aware that it necessitates more of the victims to engage in such open encounters, but we also realise the need that "All of us or None of Us" requires the perpetrators to be given the chance to become part of the process. We are also aware that the issues of oppression and injustice are complex and forbid schematic simplifications: A person oppressed by one person can easily be the oppressor of another person. Indeed, this will often be the case, as the stratification of societies and the intersectionality of discrimination is bound to allocate to us different roles in different contexts, to name but a few:

- Being discriminated against abroad on the grounds of ethnicity or origin does not prevent people from discriminating against foreigners in their own country;
- Being discriminated against as a member of an underprivileged social group does not prevent men from holding on to male-controlled structures;
- Being disenfranchised as a woman in a political system does not prevent women from taking an active role in the economic exploitation of foreign workers;
- Even being persons of colour oneself does not prevent people from seeking a higher place in an imaginary hierarchy of skin tones than others.

Indeed, the higher the level of inequality and injustice within a society (class, caste...), the more likely are people to stabilise the system by fighting for a privileged place for themselves. This insight must not be used to exculpate any individual from their personal responsibility, but rather to alter the attitude with which we enter the space of encounter: Not in a mood of accusation, but humbly accepting the possibility that reconciliation is not achieved by playing the 'blame game', but by the willingness to both repent and forgive.

**III. Letting our established perspectives and perceptions** being challenged In transforming our communities into such spaces for true and radical encounter, we are aware that they will not look the same as before. Everything that we cherish and feel at home in, may and probably will change in the process. We are not inviting the others in as guests, but we accept them as full members of the community, with the same rights and obligations that we have ourselves. In giving space, we also have to make room for new people and new ideas. In doing so, 'white' people should be cautious not to use inclusion as a new and subtle form of othering by relying on a concept of hospitality that can easily be perceived as 'host-ility'. Likewise, persons of colour should be prepared to assume good will rather than an intention to hurt, and not become oversensitive even to more clumsy attempts at inclusiveness.

A truly open dialogue will require of us not only to listen to our fellow human beings, but to hear them. It will require patience, tact and the realisation that every counterpart in dialogue has individual feelings and responses and that it is rarely helpful to base expectations on previous encounters with different persons, even though we might be addressing the same issues. Concretely, we have to be prepared to shed our preconceptions of our counterparts and give them a say in how they want to be seen and understood. We have to accept that our way of doing and seeing things may cause pain to others and the need to change. This applies individually to all who engage in such a process, but the first steps of decolonising language, culture and iconography have to be taken by those who implanted them with prejudice and contempt in the first place. It is from here that unlearning racism needs to take its start.

Having embarked on this journey, 'white people' may need to learn not only to accept that people with experiences of racial discrimination view our societies differently, but will need to see it through from the perspective of the other.

They are challenged to put themselves in another person's skin (especially if it is of a different colour), knowing that they will never truly be able to feel the pain of it. But true transformation cannot be solely based on intellectual insight but must be rooted in emotional involvement.

**IV. Taking concrete steps towards being an inclusive church** Feeling a need for change must be translated into a plan of action for the church, addressing all levels of church governance. The process must be two-directional, with the urge to change things pressing from the bottom upwards and the strategy to implement that change flowing downwards from the top levels of the decision making processes. Elements of such a plan of action should include:

- 1.) Welcoming new people into the community, for example through
  - having effective welcoming teams in every congregation, that represent diversity
  - finding ways of inviting new people to take on offices and leadership positions in the congregation (e.g. by limiting terms of office and profiling candidates for diverse boards). Diversity in leadership is a key factor in becoming an inclusive church.
- 2.) Living together as a community of different people, for example through
  - always trying to find common ground rather than to emphasise differences;
  - sharing the table, offering to others of one's own food (in a culturally sensitive way, especially when an encounter is of an interfaith nature),
  - offering home visits;
  - giving space for different traditions to feel represented by developing worship formats that include different languages and musical traditions;
  - use opportunities like the Racial Justice Sunday in February to celebrate diversity;
  - sharing responsibilities and thus enhancing a feeling of belonging and ownership;
  - reflecting in the composition of our leadership structures the community that is represented – or could represent.
- 3.) Empowering community members to foster diversity, for example through
  - including racial justice in general safeguarding procedures;
  - making bias-awareness-courses compulsory for all people in leadership positions and offering them to all others;
  - integrating diversity training and inclusion policies in group work and theological reflections;
  - giving access to existing materials on the issue, and disseminate information in an unobtrusive, yet inviting and effective manner;
  - introducing reliable mechanisms for the reporting of and responding to incidents of racism.
- 4.) Becoming a community of healing, for example through
  - acknowledging the trauma people bring from experiences of humiliation, discrimination and even open hatred and violence;
  - addressing the mental health issues that are often a consequence of such experiences;
  - creating safe (and professionally moderated) spaces for open dialogue, where people can have a deep conversation rather than just make conversation, without being in fear to be misunderstood and judged.
- 5.) Allowing for a meaningful participation of the young, for example through
  - preparing the youth for taking up responsibility from an early age;
  - developing formats for youth participation that is not limited to tokenism;- introducing quota for youth representation in all relevant bodies.





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## V. Journeying towards being a 'church for others' and with others

These first steps will obviously need to be taken within the church, for the church, transforming it so that it can be a homestead of all its members. Once that process is underway, there is a realistic chance for this powerful spirit of renewal to radiate outwards. By effectively implementing changes within, the church can set an example for the rest of society, and thus be salt of the earth. It can again become relevant for the wider community by offering good practice examples and creating a momentum for inclusiveness and respect. And, while it is a cheap excuse for state and society to reject Christian calls for justice on the grounds that churches have been and often still are themselves unjust and biased institutions, it makes the witness and prophetic voice of the church all the more authentic and compelling, when that church can be seen to be striving to transform words into action.

While we accept the challenge Dietrich Bonhoeffer put to us, that we can only truly be church if we are a 'church for others', we also realise that we are not necessarily better prepared or qualified to serve the common good than others. By starting to transform, we also seek new allies in other faith groups and within civil society. We are convinced that, in learning from them and with them, by joining forces with them, we can make a better impact- even though it might require us to leave our comfort zones.

As a consequence, by engagement and encounter with municipalities, NGOs and other secular institutions, church members, especially young Christians, could find motivation to go into politics themselves and take on responsibility in public office, not leaving this important field to people with lesser ambition and with racial biases to bring about changes for the better.

## VI. Outlining the next steps in our plan for action

Inviting all to join our vision of Belonging Together, we resolve on the following priorities:

- 1.) Responding to God, who created one humanity in all its diversity, we will – in our preaching, teaching and witness – become proponents of a theology of inclusiveness, taking seriously the notion that all human beings are God's people and children.
- 2.) We will strive to keep asking the Key Question as to whether we are doing the right things at the right time in our public witness, so that all faith communities become catalysts for racial justice, peace-making and bridgebuilding. It is either ALL of US or NONE of US.
- 3.) We will continue to be alert to the signs of the time, listen to voices, both the loud and the silenced, and design meaningful programmes to take forward the agenda from the grass roots to every realm of life.
- 4.) We will not be stalled by obstacles and resistance but will speak out boldly and without hesitation on racial injustices in our churches, explaining patiently why work on racial justice is essential in order to fulfil our calling as church and as disciples of Christ.
- 5.) We will, within the sphere of our own leadership responsibilities, work together with our communities to implement concrete measures, such as training welcoming teams and offering multicultural forms of intercessory prayers.
- 6.) We will seek to incorporate racial discrimination in the safeguarding procedures of our churches.
- 7.) We will actively seek out others in our municipalities and civil society with whom we can work together for a racially just, radically inclusive and healing society.
- 8.) We will widely distribute and discuss the Conference Statements of Freiburg and Bad Boll within our communities, making them part of our endeavour to make racial justice an enduring part in the life and witness everywhere in our churches and in society.

## Appendix:

Freiburg Conference Statement (2023)



Participants of the International Interfaith and Ecumenical Conference held at Bad Boll, Germany, 5-7 December 2024

## OUR KEY PARTNERS:







# Racial Justice – From Vision to Mission: The Time to Act is Now

**A Statement from the International and Ecumenical Racial Justice Conference**

## “God’s Kaleidoscope”

- **We dream that the daring dreams of our generation will be the reality of our children.**
- **We admit that our previous admissions of guilt have rarely been followed by atonement and reparation.**
- **We are aware that we must turn our awareness of injustice into practice of justice.**

From 9 – 11 November 2023, Christians from the Church of England, in particular the Diocese in Europe, the Racial Justice Unit, the wider Anglican Communion, partner churches and organisations, in particular WCC and USPG, as well as other Christian Churches and personalities from other faiths worldwide, have gathered at Freiburg, Germany, to hold a conference on racial justice.

Participants were aware that the first day of their meeting held a tragic significance in the context of racial hatred, as 9th November 1938 – the ‘Reichsprogromnacht’ – made unambiguously visible the systematic persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany and the annihilation of Jewish life as its ultimate goal. Participants also expressed their agony at the ongoing and unbridled violence between peoples and nations, causing so much of loss of life and challenging dreams and hopes for justice and peace in our time. They highlighted the wish for the conference to offer a sobering and discerning voice, and to restore confidence in the future. With this in mind, the Conference adopted the following Statement:

*“So God created humans in His own image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.” Gen 1:27*  
*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal 3:28*

We, as Christians from different backgrounds have come together to

- better understand the detrimental impact racial prejudice and systemic racism have on personal dignity and opportunities to develop and thrive, in our communities and societies, and how they prevent us, as the Church, from becoming the community and the force we are called to be by God;
- more fully grasp how racism is a form of violence and how othering, structural bias and discrimination relate with manifold loss of lives: through violence, armed or frozen conflicts, terrorism, and war;
- start feeling how prejudice, condescension, discrimination and humiliation – subtle or aggressive – affect real lives of real people, traumatise many of our sisters and brothers, and perpetuate pain and shame, fear, desperation and also anger;
- strengthen and speed up what little movement for racial justice there already is in our Churches, making it more visible, impossible to ignore, and turn it into a major force of transforming our churches into models of how humankind should boldly embrace its diversity and see it as an opportunity rather than as an obstacle,

- encourage and empower every person to take their fair share, claim their own space, take their position and fulfil their potential in life as a matter of course.

We therefore affirm, as our common theological basis, that  
 - racism is a sin and to justify it is a heresy because racism denies our common identity as God’s children. It is against God’s will to assign second class status to some of us based on random criteria such as race, caste, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or disability. All humans are equally loved by God and have a right to equal treatment by their fellow humans.

- it is our task to affirm our common identity as God’s children and dismantle those systems and structures which both overtly and covertly hinder us from recognising the image of God within each one of us.

- we as Christians must recognise diversity as integral to God’s design of and will for this world and affirm that, as baptised into the body of Christ, we are called to receive Christ’s promise of life in all its fullness for everyone – and be ‘born-against’ unjust systems that wish to keep it for a few. - the tapestry of our lives must be interweaving, not just bumping up against each other: As people living in the ‘middle of that tapestry of different kinds of belonging, different layers of identity, and therefore also different levels of motivation and vision... the challenge is to take seriously that diversity of different sorts of belonging, without just making them rivals to each other’ (Rowan Williams).

- we affirm and celebrate the bonds of affection that bind us together, discovering how we form the body of Christ who has torn down the dividing walls of hostility between us (Eph 2.11) and made us all heirs of God and his co-heirs (Rom 8:17).

- justice is God’s promise for a world in which wrongs are being righted, everyone’s right is being upheld, wounds are being healed, inequalities are levelled out, and peace is unfolding within all creation. Justice is an expression of God’s love, and those, who love, do justice and share what they have received.

*“Execute judgment and righteousness, and deliver the plundered out of the hand of the oppressor. Do no wrong and do no violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow.” Jer 22:3*  
*“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” James 2:17-26*

Having listened carefully to all the experiences shared, all the pains and frustrations expressed, all the hopes voiced, we call upon our Churches to

- endorse, own and increase efforts, which have been promoted by a few for many decades, to move from vision to mission, not only paying lip service to equality and justice, but living it,
- join together with all other agents of change for a better world that seems to change for the worse, and to prevent populists and nationalists from reclaiming spaces we had already believed to be liberated from repressive ideologies,





- concede power and space to young people who claim their share in reshaping the church, not just viewing them as its future, but knowing and supporting them as part of the present,
- take seriously the need for dialogue and cooperation with people of other faiths and beliefs, as injustice cannot be changed by Churches alone, even if they are united in their engagement,
- show more courage and determination in proclaiming the gospel of love, justice and peace in word and in deed with greater confidence in and commitment to what we know to be the truth and God's will for this – God's – world.

*“Whoever conceals their transgressions will not prosper, but they who confess and forsake them will obtain mercy.” Prov 28:13 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother or sister sins, rebuke them, and if they repent, forgive them. Luke 17:3*

Following deep discussions and respectful exchanges of views and experiences, we agree on the following conclusions for our Churches:

- The first step towards racial justice is to acknowledge existing injustices and their root causes. This must include an uncompromising analysis of current power structures, political, economic and ecclesial, and must include new injustices, in particular caused by ecological destruction and climate change, which follow from colonial continuities in a system based on submission and exploitation.
- The second step towards racial justice is understanding the impact of the sins of the past – such as enslavement and colonisation – on life in the present, and how they will also shape our future if we don't consciously and resolutely change course.
- The third step towards racial justice is repenting of those sins, even those that we have not committed ourselves but from which we still draw privilege and status and power, and make amends for what amends can still be made, rectify what can still be rectified, restore what can still be restored, heal what can still be healed – even at a cost to ourselves.
- The fourth step towards racial justice is giving a voice to those who were not heard, visibility to those who were overlooked, a safe place to those who were excluded, and honour to those who were looked down upon.
- The fifth step towards racial justice is to then discover how this new diversity is a strength and source of life for our Churches. They are in deep need of renewal in order to survive and thrive.

*“For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the Lord, “So shall your descendants and your name remain.” Is 66:22*

*“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” Rev 21:1.4*

During our conference, we have experienced how deep encounters and discourses can transform the way we see each other, perceive each other and understand one another. We are encouraged by this realisation and recommend that our Churches follow our example and open up spaces for conscious exchanges on the theme of racial justice. We are convinced that racial justice must be the life breath and an essential element of all ecclesial bodies and church activities.

As concrete measures to fill this claim with life we recommend that racial justice must

- be a regular and compulsory topic in all relevant deliberations and decision making processes on all levels of Church organisation,
- mandatorily be taken into account when analysing power structures and their impact on the promotion or prevention of change,
- in the Diocese in Europe of the Church of England be the subject of a study commissioned by the Diocesan Racial Justice Working Group to analyse power structures that have an impact on the promotion and/or prevention of change and the ability of our churches to be a prophetic witness to the Church and to the world,
- constitute an integral part of education and training as well as all relevant material used therein, already starting with Sunday Schools (as it is easier to learn equality than to unlearn bias). In particular, it must specifically be included, both in theology and practice, in the training programmes for curates, for lay ministers, and in the lay discipleship courses; furthermore, racial justice must be integrated into all safeguarding training programmes,
- be given visibility in our liturgies and prayers, through the inclusion of grieving for the injustices of the past, challenging unjust and biased hierarchies and stereotypes, prayers of repentance, and through reflecting the multicultural nature of God's Church.
- figure as an essential and prioritised item of the Churches' public political and advocacy work, in particular in speaking out
  - > against racism and discrimination in politics and society,
  - > against the perpetuation of patriarchal systems of humiliation and oppression,
  - > for groups which are particularly vulnerable, such as Roma people and travellers, refugees and asylum seekers,
  - > for a revision of the global economic and trade systems, giving marginalised markets a real chance and safeguarding civil, political, social, cultural and ecological human rights.



**Participants of the International and Ecumenical Racial Justice Conference at Freiburg, Germany, 9-11 November 2023**

*In Partnership with among others*



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN<sup>+</sup>  
CHURCH OF FINLAND



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