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# God's Kaleidoscope 2.0

A Newsletter of the International Racial Justice Conference



## ALL OF US or NONE OF US

The search for a new identity, where no one is a stranger and the compelling call for greater belonging found new expression at the Interfaith and Ecumenical Conference on Racial Justice that began at the Ecumenical Academy in Bad Boll on the 05 December 2024. About a Hundred delegates from all parts of the world are meeting together continuing the combined quest for a more just and inclusive community. A diverse group of people including several youngsters from many nations and cultures are meeting together to seek possibilities of transcending prejudices and boundaries and weaving together a fresh kaleidoscopic image. Chairing the sessions, Archdeacon Leslie Nathaniel pointed at the diversity in terms of ethnicities, cultures, social status, languages and living conditions of our chaplaincies that poses both challenges and opportunities – the reality of racial prejudices being a challenge and the quest to be truly the body of Christ where each persons' equality before God is affirmed – an opportunity. Greetings from the Landesbischof Emst-Willheim Gohl was read by Julie Lipp Nathaniel and from the Racial Justice unit of the Church of England by Danielle Corinne Chavarimootoo.

## Slice of Heaven

If we could foresee what the Kingdom of Heaven would look like, this would be it. Looking at the diversity of people around the registration desk, a senior member commented: "How good and pleasant it is for this wonderful variety of people to come together as one body. We have people from all continents, many nations, various shades of colours, multiple ethnic backgrounds, diverse cultural heritages and different theological perspectives – ALL coming together with an inexplicable sense of belonging and a very expressive connectedness of warmth." The very fact that conversations can happen at this meeting of cultures is in itself a possibility of learning. Each seemed eager not only to share their stories, but also to listen to the multiple stories that were in store. It surely is going to be exciting! was a refrain heard around. The conference will apart from bible studies, keynote addresses, sharing of experiences and panel discussions provide space for small group discussions, building of friendships and dreaming together for a just new world, the aroma of which can already be smelt.



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## Costly Choices Inevitable for Peaceful Coexistence

Dr. Azza Karam

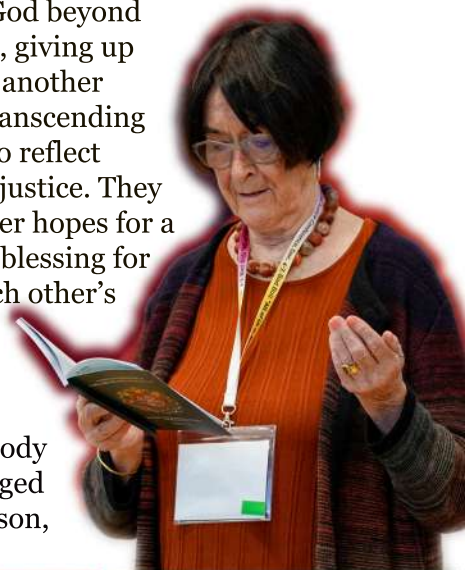
Racism presupposes intrinsic superiority of one over others and is systemically embedded. It therefore cannot be a few people's choice to deconstruct these structures. Race is not a perspective, it is a crucial organising aspect of world politics, said Professor Dr. Azza Karam, giving the keynote address of the conference. It is not about new landscapes, but about developing new eyes. Building an interfaith movement for racial justice is not a choice, but an inevitability. If another world were to happen, it is about all of us or none of us. Unfortunately, the world leaders today are not Mandelas and Gandhis. It is not only the secular political context that failed, religions and faith movements have also equally failed. Interfaith work is a crucial pointer towards social justice. Even if every single Christian in the world were to come together with one mind, the universe will not be safe. People of all faiths need to join hands. Interfaith dialogue should be a framework for working together and serving together. It should be able to see the subtleties of the layers of discrimination including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, accent, background and economics along with environmental concerns. Though no religion turns away the needy, the question is, how many are willing to come together to serve EVERYONE as EQUAL? In her powerful presentation via Zoom, Dr. Karam challenged each person to think out of the box - what it means when we say 'all of us or none of us.'

## Racial Justice Clarion Call

The Theme Song of the conference was written by Julie Lipp Nathaniel. The melody that was composed by Molly Catherine, was put into musical notation and arranged by Stephen Brown. The Theme Song incorporates the theme, the venue, the season, a dream and a prayer.

## The Interfaith Panel

One of the highlights of the first day of the conference was a fantastic panel that discussed the interfaith landscape by doing a reality check with particular reference to racial inclusion. The key question that was asked was - are we doing the right things at the right time in our public witness, so that faith communities can be catalysts towards racial justice, peace making and bridge building? The Rev. Dr. Jayakiran Sebastian, professor of mission and culture, United Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia moderated the session. In the panel was Prof. Dr. Azza Karam, Rev. Canon Dr. Sarah Siddique Gill, an ordained priest in the Church of England, with roots in Pakistan, now serving as Canon Missioner in the Leister Cathedral, Mrs. Anette Adelman, the General Secretary of the International Council of Christians and Jews and Dr. Carola Roloff, Professor for Buddhism in the Academy of World Religions, University of Hamburg. The panel questioned the yardsticks for measuring interfaith accountability, called for unlimiting God beyond exclusive truth-claims, giving up monopoly of one over another and urged everyone transcending religious boundaries to reflect God's love, peace and justice. They called to weave together hopes for a better future and be a blessing for each other sharing each other's sorrow, pain and joy and listening actively.







# Tears

are a Symbol of Yearning for Justice

Esther Mombo

Tears symbolises pain, grief, yearning for recognition, yearning to be heard, and a yearning for justice: said Esther Mombo in her powerful bible study. She also spoke of tears of othering, alienation and tears for humanisation. Love is never based on colour or creed and the constructing of the other as inferior is incomprehensible. She pointed at her grandmother’s adage- “God does not have grandchildren; God has only children.” Behind every tear there is a story that creates the tear. Unfolding that story is the task of humanisation. While racism dehumanises, patriarchy silences. She referred to the negative aspects of colonial rule in Kenya and made a reference to ‘Weep not Child,’ a 1956 novel by a Kenyan author James Ngugi. It talks about the relationship between natives and settlers in colonial Kenya and questions the bewildering disposition of people from their ancestral lands. She referred to the words of Christ: “do not weep for me; but for yourself and your children.” The gap between who we are and who we are meant to be and deciphering the causes of the gap points at systemic silencing and moaning. She also asked a very pertinent question: If Paul wrote to modern church, what would he write?

## OVERCOMING OUR OWN BLINDNESS

Racial justice is about overcoming our own prejudices, looking who is there, who can we talk to, what do we have in common, and where do we need to overcome our presumptions, said Rev Dr Patrick Schnabel. Rev. Dr. Kiran Sebastian moderated this panel of voices of people from a diversity of contexts. Rev Julius Anozzi said possibility for change begins with you and I and we should be the change. Dr Joycia Thorat, a person who worked with different communities, said: hope has two beautiful daughters – their names are anger and courage.

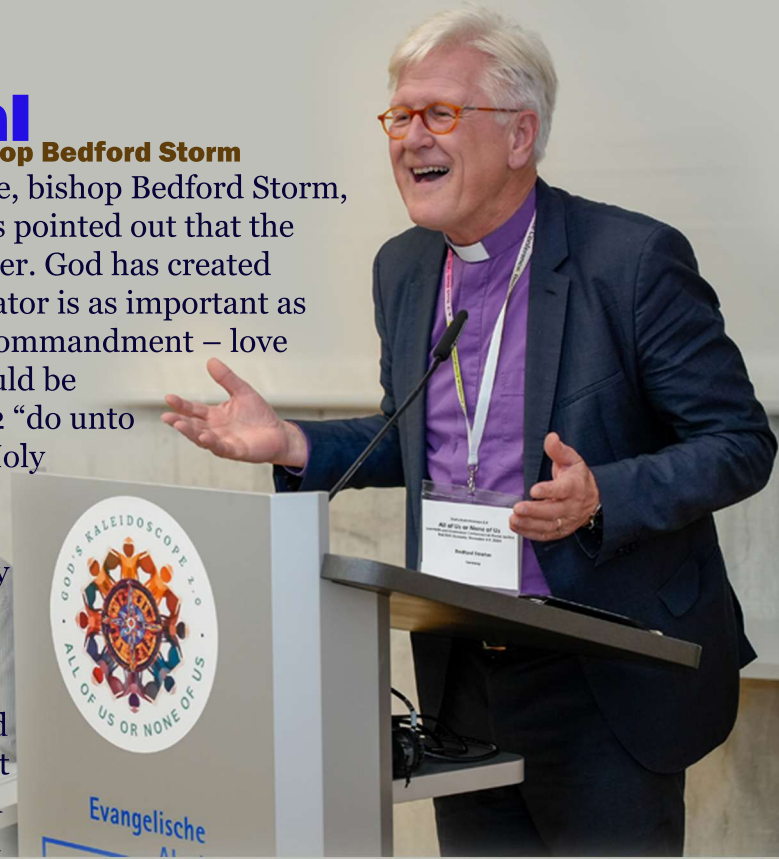




# All are created Equal

**Bishop Bedford Storm**

Delivering the keynote address at the conference, bishop Bedford Storm, the moderator of the World Council of Churches pointed out that the Bible does not say that one race is above the other. God has created everyone equally. The affirmation of God as creator is as important as Christ as the protector of strangers. The triple commandment – love yourself, love your neighbour and love God should be juxtaposed with the golden rule in Matthew 7:12 “do unto others what you want them do unto you.” The Holy Spirit on Pentecost day treats the people equal and helped each understand the language of the other. He pointed out that the Uppsala assembly of the WCC set up a commission to combat racism. The Nairobi assembly called racism as sin. The Karlsruhe assembly of 2022 affirmed racism as a transversal issue. He also mentioned about the walls of empathy- your pain is so great that you cannot see the pain of others. He called everyone to be pilgrims of justice, reconciliation and unity. Responding to the question as to when a white synod will transform to a colourful synod and who will make it happen, the bishop said: you and I here has the power to change things, let us do it. Quoting Moltman he urged “do not let those who dominate to dominate.” The bishop with his pleasant manner made an impact on everybody present.



## Curtain raiser to Cultural Evening

Elin Teilus, a Sami singer and Yoiker with her unique presence and musical voice gave a curtain raiser of the beautiful traditional music of the Sami people that she was to perform the next day. Hearing her singing is like sitting by the fire, watching stories of the ancient ones come alive.

