



## Choose Love and Forgiveness The Plea from the Young People

One of the highlights of the second day of the Conference was the plenary of the youthful voices. Grace Fagan the Head of Safeguarding of the Diocese in Europe moderated the session. Young people from across the world shared their perspectives on how they perceive the past, the present and the future. It was Nadia Sanchez with roots in Ecuador who encapsulated the sentiments of the younger generations saying- it is only through love and forgiveness that a better future can be built. While one has to stay tuned to ones own heritage and heart culture one should be willing to transcend the rigidness of boundaries and be open and welcoming, she said. While it is a fact that we are judged based on where we come from, we can be the change that should come into the mindsets of people. Jia Hu from Poland with Chinese roots talked of the shades of colors that are associated with hierarchy in the collective subconsciousness of the people. Pedro Freitas with Brazilian roots pointed at the tendency to suppress the otherness of cultures as inferior due to preconceptions that remain unchallenged. Armel Ayegnon suggested that the church should transform itself to be a cultural home for everyone- where no one is excluded and no one feels less important than the other. Akhil, with Indian roots, was of the view that the young people are not heard as they deserved to be heard and the church is failing to comprehend and understand the complex mental health needs of the new generations.

Iheama Edith touched on the assumptions people make and asked a pertinent question- how do we feel when we get to heaven if we cannot adjust to the diversity here and now? Angela Sheard asked- what do we mean by the usage of the words 'race' and 'justice' if it fails to speak the lived reality of the people around us. The young people also responded to the key question as to how the quest for racial justice shall become the quest of all - both from the north and the south and of all peoples They do not see themselves as a separate identity, but see racial justice as an intergenerational responsibility.. Grace then asked the young people to sum up their dreams in one word and some of the significant words that were voiced out included hope, forgiveness, recognition, unity, love, acceptance, plurality all of which could be said in one statement- All of us or None of Us.





# Tears are but a Passage Way

Tears are not the stopping point in the saga of pain and struggle but a passage way to a future that is shaped by the pathos of the people- said Monica Melanchton leading a Bible Study based on the experiences of the people in exile in Babylon as depicted in Psalm 137. Talking about the weeping of the people by the rivers of Babylon she said that memory of the tears that once was part of our experience should urge us to look around and see the pain of the people around us who go through same experiences of inhospitable contexts even today. Tears often signify a breaking point where one is unable to sing even if forced to. In such situations- can we sing? Should we sing? How can we sing with our musical instruments hanging in the willows? she asked.

Dr Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies at the Pilgrim Theological College, who recently was announced as a recipient of the Society of Biblical Literature's (SBL) Outstanding Mentor Award began her Bible Study recognising the tears of the aboriginal people and paying respect to elders past and present. Affirming that they never conceded their sovereignty despite the pain imposed on them she said that the people, both migrants

## Dr. Monica Melanchton



and the original owners of the land struggle with the question of belonging and the ethic of belonging. The key question though in such situations is which ethic and whose ethic. The othering is involuntarily often associated with spaces of origin and the movement of people creating- apparently strange identities that struggle to place themselves as part of one or the other. Psalm 137 is centered around political imagination reflecting how the memory of exile affects the self understanding of migrant people. The salinity of tears mixes with the Euphrates and the shades provided by the willow trees is not able to cool down the pain within their beings. An uprooted people with painful memories of what was stolen from them is singing a community lament.

The articulation of pain and tears point to systems and structures that still continue to create pain. Genuine grief cannot be outsourced- it can only be shared, she said. Pain is the door that opens to community formation and the power of non-being is established in pain. The Bible Study opened room for an array of questions including- who are the people who live in inhospitable contexts today and what is our responsibility towards them?

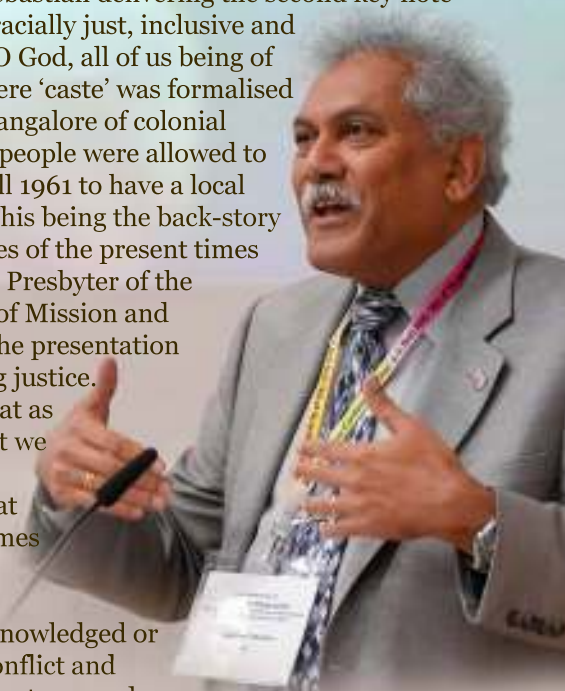
# What does “Being of One Blood” Mean?

## Dr. Kiran Sebastian

There is so much more to identity than we see on the outside, said Dr. Sebastian delivering the second key note address on the theme- Redesigning our ecumenical landscape towards a racially just, inclusive and healing community. Referring to Bishop Cotton who coined the prayer- “O God, all of us being of one blood” he asked what does it mean to be of one blood in a context where ‘caste’ was formalised during the colonial regime. He pointed at the church in his home town, Bangalore of colonial times and referred to St. Marks Cathedral where only one race or class of people were allowed to worship. Others had to worship in a different campus. They had to wait till 1961 to have a local priest and even that was palatable because he was ordained in England. This being the back-story to build a future that is non-heirarchical and addressing the new age biases of the present times would be an ardent task, he said. The Rev. Dr. J. Jayakiran Sebastian is a Presbyter of the Church of South India and The H. George Anderson Chair and Professor of Mission and Cultures at the United Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia. Responding to the presentation Tariro Matsiveru argued that flipping the script of injustice does not bring justice.

The young are also the future and the future is now. She acknowledged that as we look around there are already very positive signs of racial inclusion but we must understand that there is no easy road to freedom. We must act together as a united people. She also said that there is an “in-between” that we must be alert to. We have touched on racism, patriarchy and alike themes but being a church in Europe has very different nuances and shades that spearates people from people which need to be identified and addressed.

Tomi Kartunen spoke from a Finnish perspective how racism was not acknowledged or identified at all. Dr. Klaus Schaeffer spoke if the dialectical approach of conflict and reconciliation. We should create safe spaces where victims can boldly share tears and stories and get their power back which was robbed of them and would be able to raise up their heads and walk. That is the mandate of the ecumenical movement. Developing safe spaces however is not an easy task. Edith Ihema pointed out that racism is beyond surface conversations- it is a systemic structural deep rooted issue. Dr. Sarah Siddique Gill mentioned about the anger when you are on the bad side. Bishop Antonio Ablon asked- when should the church be law abiding instead of Christ abiding when both together would be hard.







## EITHER ALL ARE HEALTHY OR NONE

The perspectives on health and racial justice in a key note presentation raised a few pertinent questions. Dr med. Gisela Schneider Direktorin, Deutsches Institut für Ärztliche Mission e.V.; Tübingen pointed out that one area where discrimination manifests itself is the area of access to health and healing. Access matters: it is a matter of justice, she said. Why is it that we have the best treatment and medicines for cancer in Europe while we offer only Palliative care to mothers of sub-saharan Africa? she asked. Pointing out various contexts from across the world she affirmed- healing is only possible if justice is rolled out for all.

Lorena Catalina Bonilla Garcia, Member of the Commission of the Churches on Health and Healing of the World Council of Churches who is also the Chair of the Working Group of the Commission on Mental Health asked if everyone around the table feels a sense of belonging to the table. She spoke on the key issues of mental health and stigma saying- labelling human differences, stereotyping and separating them from what we call “us” is the mindset that we need to address first. She also spoke of the intersectionality and stigma and said- church should be a safe space where everyone should feel welcome and not discriminated against.

Fr. Michael Lapsely said on a good day we seem to be going forward and on a bad day we seem to be going backwards. Healing is all about restorative justice and it is centered on the healing of wounds of history. Interfaith movements can play a central role in this process. Wounds sometimes cross generations. I cannot change the colour of my skin nor where I was born but I can surely improve the way I treat other people. Apartheid was the elephant in the room. We should aim at a non racial, non sexist society for healing to truly manifest. Dr. Manoj Kurien, Director, Health and Healing of the World Council of Churches moderated the session.

## STORIES AS POWERFUL TOOLS OF TRANSFORMATION

The Stories of People was a wonderful segment of the conference where the participants heard first hand from the experiences of people how racism manifests itself in varied forms Dr. Pearly Walter Usha, the Chaplain of Heidelberg spoke of the discrimination based on caste and compared casteism and racism. She also spoke about the feminist movements and Dalit womanism. It was eye opening listening to the narrative as to how caste and sub-caste dynamics work and how it is different from racism. For her real liberation happens only when the last person in a community is empowered.

Fr. Michael Lapsley, President of the Healing of Memories Global Network, called himself the white boy who always fought racism and paid the price for the same. He said there are three kinds of people, the oppressed, the oppressor and the human being and he preferred to be identified as part of the third. Apartheid was for him both a theological problem and a faith problem and the only weapon he said that he used to fight it was his words. Living out the gospel of life mandated the option of dying. Though he was deeply affected in a letter bomb that took away both his hands and an eye he still said- they had lost and I had won. He spent his entire life creating safe and sacred spaces.

Grace Fagan Stewart spoke of her experiences of living with Jamaican roots in a context of white cardigans and how she struggled even to find a job because of her colour. Pedro Martins spoke of his black, Italian and indigeneous roots and spoke of the identity question of being neither white or black. He spoke of the people who told him, “we want to keep the church of England, english” and how voices that differed were systemically silenced and sidelined. All Latinos become Liberation Theologians because of this experience of sidelining and the deep desire for fullness of life, he said.





# Enjoyable Yoiker Evenings

Cultural Evenings with Elin Teilus a Sámi singer, yoiker (a traditional form of song/cultural expression) and touring artist from Sweden was a Conference highlight. She is described as a force of nature, with a unique presence and magical voice, a bringer of the beautiful traditional music of the Sámi people into new worlds. At the heart of her artistry is the love of the Earth and all the living. The music encapsulates grand sceneries and at the same time remaining intimately close, always with elements of free creation. Hearing her sing is like sitting by the fire watching stories of the ancient ones come alive. Elin invited us to remember the untouched, sacred connection with life that dwells in human beings. The Cultural Council of Västra Götaland notes "... Within Elin Teilus' music the Sámi tradition of storytelling is alive; Listen to her joik and you will meet the reindeers, the clear water of the cold well... It brings hope for the understanding and respect of the Sámi identity and history."



It's All About Conversations

