



World Council of Churches

World Council of Churches – General Secretary

Role and Responsibilities

WCC Basis

"The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (WCC Constitution Article I)

WCC Purposes and Functions

"The World Council of Churches is constituted by the churches to serve the one ecumenical movement. It incorporates the work of the world movements for Faith and Order and Life and Work, the International Missionary Council, and the World Council of Christian Education. The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe." (WCC Constitution Article III)

Program Priorities (2013–2021)

In the WCC's 10th assembly (Busan 2013) formulated the Council's program priorities of the current period. The WCC is working within the framework of programs, each of which builds on past work in these areas, under the over-arching theme *Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* (Each program area includes on-going and time-bound projects and activities):

1. Unity, Mission and Ecumenical Relations
2. Public Witness and Diakonia
3. Ecumenical Formation

In 2014, the central committee identified overall objectives of the Council's engagement in the *Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, focusing on

- a life-affirming economy
- climate change
- just peace
- human rights

In 2018, the central committee adopted the WCC strategic plan for 2018-2021, maintaining the *Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* as the strategic direction; and re-affirming the five strategic objectives:

- Strengthening the fellowship
- Witnessing together

- Encouraging spirituality, reflection and ecumenical formation
- Building trust and understanding
- Inspiring and innovative communication

Authority

“The general secretary shall lead the work of the World Council of Churches and shall speak on its behalf. The general secretary shall serve as the chief executive officer of the Council, including final responsibility for the work of the Council and its staff.”¹

Responsibility

“The general secretary shall have the responsibility to interpret and promote the strategic vision of the WCC consistent with its Basis and Purposes, the mandates of the assemblies during which he/she serves, and in consultation with its governance leadership and governing bodies. The general secretary will represent the WCC in its strategic leadership role for the one ecumenical movement, interpreting the programs of the WCC to the member churches, ecumenical partners, secular bodies and governmental authorities, and the world at large.

Consistent with the Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches and with Swiss law, the general secretary shall identify staff and consultants qualified and mandated to develop and implement the WCC’s programs and objectives as approved by the governing bodies, and oversee their work. Together with WCC staff and consultants, the general secretary shall listen to, gather, analyze, interpret and respond to the changing religious and cultural context, the changing ecclesial and ecumenical context, the changing international and political context, and the changing economic and social context as these affect the member churches, the fellowship of churches and the ecumenical movement.”²

Currently, the WCC is engaged in a long-term development of its real property in Geneva (the “Green Village” site development). The general secretary shall oversee the development of this project and assure its feasibility – in cooperation with the appropriate leadership of the central committee.

Delegation

“The general secretary shall be accountable to the central committee for the programs, policies and strategic direction of the Council, and will delegate to competent qualified staff appropriate responsibilities and assure the effective, efficient and transparent management of the human and financial resources of the Council.”³

¹ World Council of Churches, Supplement to the Rules, 2012.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Qualifications

The general secretary shall be expected to be a gifted, skilled and experienced Christian theologian; a leader with deep spiritual discernment alert to the 'signs of the times', grounded in the Scriptures and prayer. He/she needs to be able to articulate and communicate theological reflections to a wider audience. He/she shall thereby strengthen the voice of the Council in international affairs, interreligious dialogue, as well as in mission and evangelism.

"He/she will be an active lay or ordained member of a Christian community that is one of the member churches of the WCC .

The general secretary will be expected to demonstrate

- (a) deep knowledge and experience with the World Council of Churches,
- (b) understanding of, respect and sensitivity for its various member churches and ecumenical partners,
- (c) commitment to hold in balance the different historical streams of work of the Council (Faith and Order, Mission and Evangelism, Education and Ecumenical Formation, and Life and Work), and
- (d) a clear commitment to the world-wide mission of the Church today.

He/she must have a breadth and depth of vision for the future of the WCC and the ecumenical movement and must be able to articulate, orally and in writing, the possibilities and promise of the ecumenical movement, and be deeply committed to ecumenism and the purposes of the WCC. He/she will lead the development of the WCC in ways consistent with the stated program priorities.

He/she must have knowledge of, and relationships with, other faith communities and be committed to inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

Among the most crucial administrative roles of the general secretary will be his/her intentional cultivation of teamwork and respect within the staff of the WCC and between and among the staff and the members of governing bodies, and of the ethos of consensus. He/she shall listen to the staff and build consensus within the team, seeking to encourage connections to be made between the various areas of work. The general secretary shall encourage and nurture staff expertise, commitment and dialogue, made manifest in a dedicated and spiritual community of the Council."⁴

Requirements

1. A nomination and recommendation must be received from the leadership of the WCC member church of which the applicant is a member.
2. A post-graduate degree in theology, preferably a doctorate.
3. Normally fluent in English and at least one other WCC working language.
4. Knowledge of the WCC and demonstrated commitment to its aims as stated in the WCC Constitution.

⁴ Ibid.

Term of Appointment and Appraisals

The normal term of appointment for the general secretary shall be five years, unless some other period is stated in the resolution making the appointment.

Periodic appraisals, including self-appraisals of the general secretary shall be conducted for the benefit of both the general secretary and the governing bodies, in order to provide constructive feedback on his or her performance relative to stated expectations and provide an opportunity to improve.

Retirement shall normally be at sixty-five for both men and women and in no event shall it be later than the end of the year in which a staff member reaches the age of sixty-eight.⁵

⁵ cf. Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches, and Supplement to the Rules.