



*What Does the God Require from Us:  
Discerning, Confessing, and Witnessing in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond*

## **Being a Global Koinonia: Introduction to the Discernment Process**

In Psalm 11:3, faced with a seemingly insurmountable crisis, the psalmist asks, “If foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?”

As a global *koinonia* called to communion and committed to justice, how specifically are we called to be a communion in these foundation-shattering times?

Discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed together. Verbs in the present tense. Verbs that incarnate what we are called to do as a global family, as regional group, and as member churches. This we do together; our *koinonia* is God’s gift to be received and nurtured. A reformed community always reforming according to the Word of God.

Rothney has spoken to the centrality of confession in our tradition. We had heard the depth and breadth of the impact of COVID-19 and its apocalyptic force revealing, unveiling, exposing, lifting up the unjust and death-dealing world order that existed before but has been exacerbated profoundly by the pandemic. We have heard of the call to enter as a *koinonia* leading up to our 2024 General Council in a “*processus confessionis*” addressing theologically the fundamental challenges to the integrity of our faith in Jesus Christ and the confession that “the Earth is the Lords and all that is in it” in the face of a world order far from peace, justice, truth, and life. Before COVID-19 we heard the call to live out the reality of the Accra Confession and the spirit of the Belhar Confession in addressing the scandal of the death-dealing reality of a whole world in the captivity of Babylon and being stirred up in the rising up through the cries of people and the earth to seek life and respond to God’s call. On top of this all the specific and very real COVID-19 pandemic.

At the center of this is discernment: As the Accra Confession said: “The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted.” For our global *koinonia* this means we must do the discerning together. We are called to a process that mobilizes, involves, and strengthens and, with God’s help, empowers the whole global family in our difference and distinctiveness. The process we are undertaking requires a focus on reading the signs of the times that takes seriously injustice and brokenness of our world and our own churches. Our communion is not yet the *koinonia* God calls us to be.

This process then requires us a theologically and biblically rooted engagement that speaks to global, regional, national, and local realities. We must recognize the interconnection between

the local and the global. There is no local reality which is not impacted by and shaped by the global world order. There is no global reality that is not constructed through and by local communities and resources.

This crisis and the virtual tools now available also allow and require us to strengthen our *koinonia* through the process of discernment circles. Our process continues the crucial process of identifying and engaging all the voices and perspectives and identities that make up our family. This is a work in progress, but key to our process is the for us to do our discerning in such a way as to contribute to building a just communion. To foreground the voices and leadership of those in the family who have not been heard or have been impeded or excluded.

Discerning requires us to read the signs of the time biblically and theologically, locally, regionally, and globally together to mobilize our whole communion as a confessing, witnessing family committed to our own transformation and radical change in service to the God of life.

Our process then focuses on the WHO. As far as we are able this must be the whole communion. Involved and engaged. All our stories, realities, locations, and identities. This WHO includes all the partners that God provides. We have a special relationship with the Council for World Mission (CWM). The Lutherans. The World Council of Churches (WCC). The JDDJ (Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification group of five communions). Interfaith partners and social movements and so on.

Our process focuses on the WHAT. The reading of the signs of the time. The COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Addressing the mandates and calls emerging from Accra, Belhar, and the Leipzig General Council. The lived experiences of our churches. A world fallen among thieves. The cries of people and creation.

Our process focusses on HOW. First the discernment circles being launched today. Listening, discerning from the diverse perspectives and distinct realities that make up our one family. Critical theological and biblical reflection. This process will be aided by the input of a statement which allows us to focus and summarize our learnings.

The process involves a rhythm of discernment circles following the liturgical year and putting specific realities in interaction with specific regions and concrete identities and groups within our family. This is a process continuing on to next September and leads to a hopefully face-to-face convocation or conference where the discernment is articulated and the process further defined to lead us to the 2024 General Council.

In this process of discernment and the team that has been assembled it is clear that all of our ways of being *koinonia* together are interwoven. So while the discernment circles are focused on discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed are also intermixed in reflections and actions during this next year. We do not want to create a false separation between our ways of being *koinonia*.

The process is marked by urgency to respond to God's call. *Koinonia* is our gift. Justice is our responsibility.

Discerning together is also a gift so that we uphold each other to do together that which we cannot do alone and to honour that which each one of us brings to this global family. For indeed when one suffers we all suffer, and even so when one rejoices we all rejoice.

—Chris Ferguson, general secretary