

## Stefan Jerome Wilson – A Caribbean Ecumenical Reflection

The region of sun, beaches, relaxation and a cool breeze is marked by many as the Caribbean. I stand here before you as a Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of the Caribbean island of Trinidad and Tobago, the last island of the chain of islands closest to Latin America. Let me paint a vivid picture of ecumenism. It is difficult to promote an ideology of unity and cooperation in an ethnically diverse and racially divided society. Despite the beauty of this region, it does not hide the ugliness of racism, crime and social inequality. The apostle Paul urges in Christ for agreement to reside with another, absent of division, and perfectly united in mind and thought. The first question I ask myself; is ecumenism relevant and needed? The island of Trinidad, once colonized, has been flavoured with many Christian traditions from Catholic to Protestant to African Independent Churches. I come from a culture whereby the Presbyterian Church is branded as the “Indian Church”. The Pentecostals is branded as the “African”. Casual comments are made by religious leaders in that “Protestants don’t believe enough” or that “Catholics are idol worshippers”. To answer the question “is ecumenism relevant and needed?” then: Yes, it is VERY relevant and needed. To hear these comments in 2023 reminds me as an ecumenist that there are mindsets which are at opposite sides and still need to be touched with an ecumenical hand.

The Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago (PCTT) is a member of many ecumenical organizations, including the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches. But the ‘challenge’ is becoming more of a ‘member’ to its ecumenical movement. In Trinidad, attending church services together and participating in the week of prayer for Christian unity are two such ways of seeing ecumenism. All these elements are lovely to see in Trinidad. But isn’t it more than that? With a pandemic that has scarred many countries, and has created unsettling socio-political global changes, how have the churches united to combat the prejudices and issues that pervade humanity? When churches basically exist side by side rather than as ‘one’, how can we say that ecumenism is striving? Emilio Castro states, “we are called to present the witness of a united church which can symbolize, anticipate and serve the reconciliation and unity of all humanity and the whole creation.”<sup>1</sup>

But, there is hope. Hope for a brighter future, and the blessing of studying my Master’s Degree in Ecumenism is learning strategies, skills and wrestling with theological giants in doctrine and practice to become a better promoter of ‘unity’ absent of ‘uniformity’ in ‘diversity’. I dream of establishing Christ church camps in the Youth Ministry of the Church, inviting theological minds across denomination and tradition to learn that the ‘other’ is actually our ‘brother’, to gain deeper understanding of one’s own tradition in the same faith, the same Lord Jesus Christ, and in the same Baptism. So, in Trinidad, Ecumenism is present but in some ways absent, living and in some ways need of resurrection, small, but in some ways big. There is much work to be done. I’m still alive and kicking. So shall ecumenism be.

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<sup>1</sup> Emilio Castro, *A Passion for Unity: Essays on Ecumenical Hopes and Challenges* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), 1.