



## Farewell Message from the outgoing General Secretary Christine Housel

### Call for Engagement with WSCF in times of Transition

Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup> 2015, Geneva

Dear SCMers, dear Senior Friends, dear Partners, dear Friends,

As I finish my last official day as General Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), a colleague informed me that this was the exact day of the year that Rev Dr Philip Potter finished his term as chairperson of the WSCF, and I just now received the news that Philip Potter died today at the age of 93. Philip Potter, one of the great ecumenical leaders of our time, is widely lauded for his leadership in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. How many know of his earlier formation in the Jamaica Student Christian Movement (SCM) and his leadership of the WSCF as its Chairperson.

As we grieve his passing and honour his life, I would like to lift up the historic and current importance of the WSCF through this message.

About one year after my predecessor Michael Wallace declared his resignation after his term of reasserting WSCF as a leader in ecumenical formation and youth engagement in social justice, I was elected as General Secretary in October 2010. I had been serving as the Global Project Manager, tasked with re-engaging WSCF in international advocacy and solidarity as well as working to support the revision and new directions for the Ecumenical Assistance Programme (EAP), which was a vehicle to support the movement building and development work of our SCMs. With the increased opportunity to develop the grassroots global connections, and strengthen our unified worldwide voice for justice, the students were excited about the new mechanisms we were developing to unify our vision, strategy, and functioning. With the threat to the Ecumenical Assistance Programme and recognition of a need for a more unified and articulated programme framework and monitoring and reporting system in WSCF, there was also some recognition that change was needed, and indeed possible. During such an association with the WSCF, I had seen personally the immense talent, faithfulness, and potential of our students and SCMs, and realized that there was a movement of change within the WSCF.

I knew the immense challenge ahead already in 2010 while still Project Manager. With a sizeable inherited deficit, we would not be able to re-hire a Project Manager; we could not immediately implement the changes to the EAP identified. We needed to make changes in the administrative staff due to financial constraints. There was a need at once to utilize much-needed survival skills for the crisis, while simultaneously creating a renewed vision for the future. In spite of such limitations, I took up the challenge and offered to serve willingly because I was inspired by WSCF's history and heritage and confident in our students' genuine Christian commitment to building peace with justice in this world. The most motivating factor was belief in the inherent movement characteristics of students and senior friends - both present and past - of the WSCF.

These past four years have been rich in laying firm foundations for change; full of struggles, full of creativity, full of accomplishments, full of limitations. We balanced our budget each year, and reduced the deficit each year except for this year when the focus on the GA set us back. We mobilized interns and volunteers and recently the IRO had a group of 20 active volunteers who came for the period of GA preparations and also helped us make much more progress with our communications, fundraising, and project goals. Our students and staff participated in larger ecumenical processes with a view to deepening strategic partnership and collaboration; we began engaging our senior friends at a deeper level, inviting their holistic accompaniment. We developed a global strategic plan, a new mechanism for us, and began implementing global and regional programming according to it. We subsequently were able to approach fundraising and partnership with more clearly articulated goals and had success in developing new funding and implementation partnerships even during this strained period. We began to achieve consolidated regional and inter-regional narrative and financial reporting; we achieved a half million dollar GA with no deficit to the organization.

The primary goal for the GA was to help our community understand and accept that change is needed, is desirable, and is possible.

We can thank God that the goal was partially achieved. Most realize that the expense and approach of this Assembly will likely not be possible again. Like many ecumenical organizations with vast diversity of cultures and traditions, experiments and experiences, WSCF is locked into some patterns that do not readily allow needed innovation and organizational change to take place. If only we can break free of some of them, while at the same time maintaining our distinct identity, self-hood, and values, the WSCF could once again be in an influential position to galvanize youth from our own and many other communities. The WSCF could work out directions and take action that could inspire the church and ecumenical community to relate creatively with those forces offering abundant life in Christ to all of humanity, as has been our heritage.

The major agenda at the GA was the Future of the Federation, including the need to re-focus that identity and mission, and to reform the structure and functioning, in order to become effective and sustainable today. A Task Group was mobilized to help leverage this message at the Assembly and bring some initial recommendations to get us started in a concrete and committed change process. This Future of the Federation Task Group helped the Assembly face the reality of the need for development and change. They made recommendations, adopted by the GA, to suspend the position of General Secretary for the initial 6-9 month transition period instead of usual process of selecting a General Secretary at the GA; there would instead be an Interim Coordinator who would work with a Transition Team.

What we can hope is that the Acting Chairperson and other officers, the Interim Coordinator, and the Transition Team will provide the leadership the WSCF needs at this time to find and secure the Future of WSCF.

The WSCF remains a unique faith-based, student-oriented, and socially-driven ecumenical movement, which has in the past, and continues to possess the potentials to make a tremendous contribution in the overall ministry of the church for social transformation.

At this juncture of my farewell, I would like to invite all those seriously concerned about the future of the WSCF to engage themselves in the Federation, and offer support and accompaniment to its members. I invite you to raise issues and concerns that would keep the distinct characteristic of this historical ecumenical movement alive as a radical voice of students and senior friends. This is the time for the ecumenical community who knows the legacy and potential of WSCF to play a proactive role in helping WSCF find its future, with the hope that this renewed WSCF will be a blessing to the entire community. I also invite you to join me in praying regularly for WSCF and its leaders at all levels during the coming months.

I feel a deep sense of gratitude to all of you for various ways and means that you sustained and encouraged me in performing my tasks and responsibilities as the General Secretary of this pioneering and prestigious ecumenical movement/organisation.

Thank you for the many ways you have all contributed to WSCF and to me personally. It has been an honour to serve WSCF as its General Secretary, and to have you as colleagues, friends, and well-wishers. I will miss you all!

God bless you and your continued work as you serve the ecumenical movement so needed in the world today!

*Ut Omnes Unum Sint, That they all shall be one*

Yours faithfully,



Christine Housel

World Student Christian Federation

General Secretary, October 2010 - March 2015

Please do stay in touch. You may reach me at the coordinates below:

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