

Rev. Canon John Pobee

Holy Trinity Church is privileged and has benefitted vastly from Anglican clergy who held positions at the World Council of Churches head-quartered in Geneva, and who worshipped and preached regularly at HTC.

One such clergyman was the **Rev Canon John Pobee (1937 to 2020)** who was with the WCC in the 1980s & 90s. and sadly passed away in Ghana in 2020. The following is an extract regarding his time at the WCC, from a longer comprehensive article appearing in the Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB).

<https://dacb.org/stories/ghana/pobee-johns/>



Ecumenical Career

Introduced to the World Council of Churches by the then Rev. Fr. (later Archbishop) Desmond Tutu, who was, at the time, associate director for Africa at the Theological Education Fund based in the UK, Pobee was to be appointed from 1983 as associate director of the Programme of Theological Education in Geneva, and later as Coordinator of Theological Education. During his fifteen-year sojourn in Geneva, he also served at one time as academic dean at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey.

The WCC offers this tribute: *The encounter with Tutu led Pobee to become a member of the Commission for the Theological Education Fund which afforded him numerous opportunities to engage with prominent theologians and church leaders from a wide spectrum of denominations and continents. In his autobiography Sense of Grace and Mission Pobee acknowledges that these encounters helped him to learn that ecumenism entailed opening up to and engaging the other, different as they may be. He could never again be the narrow faithful Anglican and Ghanaian. He began the journey to becoming a world citizen and an ecumenical Christian.*

Pobee continued to be an external examiner and visiting professor in many tertiary institutions in Africa, India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, the Pacific, Latin America, West Indies, USA, UK, and the Netherlands.

Pobee also had a commitment for the inclusion of women in theological education, ministerial formation and church leadership, including ordained ministry. Pobee's habit of promoting women in theology is confirmed by Prof Mercy Amba Oduyoye, former WCC deputy general secretary and a fellow Ghanaian who acknowledged the servant role ("backroom boy" in his own words) Pobee played in the inauguration of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989, in Accra, Ghana. In this context, Pobee himself said "a group of women led him to put 'women in theology' on the agenda." He also initiated and published some volumes on women in theology.

The current WCC deputy general secretary, an African woman, Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri also reflects: "What Pobee did through the WCC is unforgettable. He truly had the empowerment of young ecumenists from the global south at heart." Dr Ofelia Ortega, pastor of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba and former President of the World Council of Churches (2006-2013), also pays tribute by singling out Pobee's encouragement of women in theology.

She states: I was working under his leadership in this programme as Executive Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean for eight years. During these years being a woman theologian and coming from the global south (Cuba) I was surprised to see his continued work for women in Africa and in our regions. He proposed to dedicate a fundamental part of our funds to support women theologians to organize their programmes (as for instance the African Circle of Women) and to find resources for scholarships to train women theologians in Latin America and Caribbean regions. Many of our women leaders in our region received his help to finish their doctoral degrees.

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit commended Pobee's long and rich influence on young people who went on to form the heart of the ecumenical movement. "We are grateful for both his vast array of knowledge and, even more, for his dedication to sharing it with those who will carry on," said Tveit. "We pray for his family and loved ones, and we will embrace his legacy with respect and affection."

Hubert van Beek, the founding Secretary, Global Christian Forum, and former staff colleague of Pobee at WCC, recalls: *in his inimitable manner, he (Pobee) had enabled me to see the African side of any matter. I also remember him as one who would speak joyously and without inhibition of his faith in the corridors of the Ecumenical Centre. One area of my work in which John made significant contributions was the building and nurturing of relationships of African Instituted Churches with the World Council of Churches, and their involvement in the ecumenical movement.*

The Rev. Prof J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, President of Trinity Theological Seminary expressed gratitude for Pobee's service on their Governing Council, his provision of books and other resources and a personal friendship that endured to his great advantage. It is to Pobee's credit that the Catholic authorities in Ghana, invited him to be the first Rector of the Catholic University in Ghana, a position he graciously declined.

The years in Geneva when Pobee was with the World Council of Churches, John S. Mbiti at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, and Dr. Mercy Oduyoye was Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Church were remarkably robust. Their camaraderie and theological output propelled the African Christian presence onto a global platform.