Exploring YMCA **Christian Identity** in the 21st Century

A summary report on the 2-year Movement-wide Conversation (2023–2025)

and the concluding 2-month Consultation (February–March 2026)

Presented to the World YMCA Executive Committee (as the project sponsors), by the project Steering Committee on 25 April 2026

INDEX

Summary & recommendations 4–7

Annex A: The Conversation (2023–2025) 8–15

A1. Origins & purpose 8
A2. Process 8
A3. The spirit of the Conversations 9

A4. Global themes & insights 9–11
A4.1 Christian identity in the 21st Century 9–10
A4.2 Inclusivity 9–10
A4.3 Unity in diversity 10
A4.4 Christian faith in action 11
A4.5 Youth perspectives 11

A5. Regional insights 12–13
A5.7 Response to Halifax Declaration 13

A6. Responses to the four core questions 13–15
A6.1 What it means to be a Christian Movement 13
A6.2 Inclusivity across faiths 13–14
A6.3 Managing global diversity 14
A6.4 Stories shaping identity 15

Annex B: The Consultation (February–March 2026) 16–17

B1. Overview of the Consultation 16
B2. Participation, engagement and response patterns 16
B3. Areas of convergence 17
B4. Areas of divergence and the need for clarification 17
B5. Understanding diversity, alignment and Movement dynamics 17

Annex C: Proposed way forward 18

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A summary report on a 2-year Movement-wide 'Conversation' (2023–2025) and its concluding 2-month 'Consultation' (February–March 2026)

Presented to the World YMCA Executive Committee

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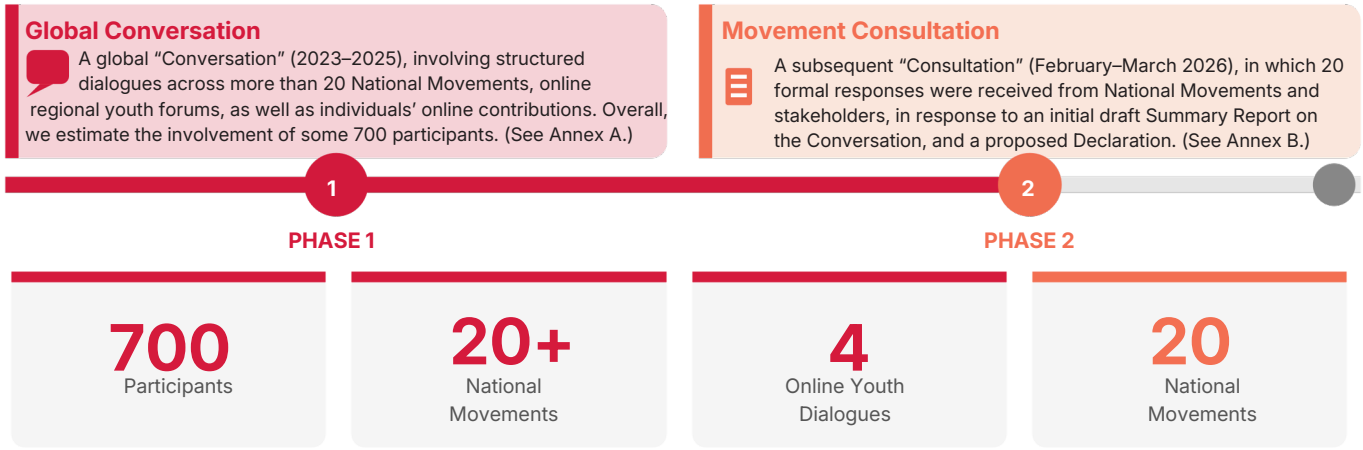
This document builds on an earlier document of December 2025 which summarised the findings of the Conversation. It adds a Summary & recommendations, as well as Annex B and Annex C. The Conversation is covered in Annex A, and has been updated to reflect helpful comments made during the Consultation period.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

This Report presents the outcomes of a two-stage, Movement-wide process initiated by the World YMCA Executive Committee to explore the YMCA's Christian identity in the 21st Century.

The Process



What the process revealed

The two phases of the project differed in both format and participation. The Conversation unfolded in a structured yet decentralised and diverse way over 3 years; the Consultation unfolded in a more concentrated and formal way over 2 months.

The Conversation phase was characterised by a specifically designed process, facilitated dialogue (with training provided for facilitators), storytelling, and broad participation. Many inputs from the Conversation phase, particularly from the youth dialogues and the online contributions, were personal, unfiltered, and experiential in nature.

The Consultation phase invited formal responses from the global Movement. It also generated additional informal contributions, including from individuals and groups who had not participated in earlier conversations.

The Consultation phase also highlighted differences in how participants engaged with the process itself.

The strength of conviction on these issues, combined with differing theological perspectives, contributed to:

- the formation of coalitions and coordinated responses
- engagement that extended beyond national or regional structures
- responses shaped around shared theological positions as well as organisational contexts.

The process itself, then, revealed the complexity of engaging the worldwide YMCA Movement on questions of Christian identity. Contributions reflected deeply held convictions, significant contextual differences, and a high level of engagement across the global YMCA.

This document reflects both phases. It reports what was heard through the Conversation, and what was then affirmed, challenged, and expanded through the Consultation.

We report on five main findings which we feel emerged from the Conversation and the Consultation.

Five main emerging findings from the Conversation & Consultation

The Conversation and Consultation revealed that the YMCA affirms that it is a Christian Movement

Across the Conversation and Consultation, there is clear and widespread affirmation that the YMCA is a Christian organisation with a foundation built on Jesus Christ. This identity, 'who we are' at our core, is described not only as historical and foundational, but as ongoing and enduring. Participants across many contexts referenced faith in Jesus Christ, and the importance of the Paris Basis – contextualised in the Kampala Statement of 1973 and Challenge 21 of 1998 – which have shaped both the purpose and present reality of the YMCA Movement.

At the same time, the Conversation and Consultation outputs distinguished between:

- Christian 'identity' – who the YMCA is, at its core; and
- The 'expression' of Christian 'identity'– how that identity is lived, articulated, and embodied in different contexts and among different parts of the Movement.

This distinction became clearer through the Consultation phase, and provides a helpful lens for understanding both alignment and divergence across the Movement.

1

The Conversation and Consultation revealed that the YMCA Movement is not one uniform block in expressing its Christian identity

While there is strong alignment around the Christian identity of the YMCA, there is significant diversity in Christian expression, and how our Christian identity takes shape in the world.

From the responses, a range of approaches to 'Christian expression' within the YMCA Movement were observed. Among them, we identified those that were strongly confessional with explicit articulation of Christian belief and doctrine, those that were evangelistic in either preaching or showing the Gospel, those that were ecumenical in uniting Christians, those that shared the legacy and subsequent history of an organisation founded on faith, and those that saw their work – with or without specific reference to Christianity – as an expression of the Christian and universal values of love, dignity and compassion, and a practical commitment to service, justice, and community engagement.

These expressions are not mutually exclusive, hierarchical, or sequential, and are often present in combination within the same individuals, YMCAs or contexts at any given time. We see them within the YMCA Movement, just as we see them within the individuals who make up the YMCA.

Unfortunately, this diversity of expression also creates a real challenge for our Movement. The Conversation and Consultation suggest that these challenges arise due to a limited shared understanding and capability across the Movement both to acknowledge and to manage this diversity constructively.

Consequently, although this diversity is a lived reality, it is not always explicitly acknowledged or effectively navigated. At times, it reveals underlying tensions and fractures within the Movement.

2

The Conversation and Consultation revealed that the YMCA Movement is broadly aligned in many ways

Across both phases, several areas of broad alignment can be identified:

- **Christian identity**

There is widespread affirmation that the YMCA's identity is Christian, with that identity understood as historical, current, and enduring.

- **Christian faith in action**

Almost all contributors emphasised the importance of a lived expression of Christian identity, demonstrated through service, justice, compassion, and community engagement.

- **Inclusivity in service**

There is strong support for the YMCA being open and accessible to people of all faiths and none, in relation to the people and the communities whom the YMCA serves.

- **Global unity with local expression**

The Movement is widely understood as globally connected, sharing a common identity, history, and purpose, while proud of – and fully functioning across – all its diverse local contexts, with some 12,000 local associations

These areas reflect where much of the Movement converges, even as interpretations and emphases differ.

3

FIVE MAIN FINDINGS from the Conversation & Consultation

The Conversation and Consultation revealed that the YMCA Movement is also experiencing significant areas of divergence and tension

Alongside the areas of alignment, the Conversation and Consultation surfaced a number of ongoing tensions:

- **Clarity and explicitness of Christian identity**

Differing views exist on how explicitly the YMCA should articulate its Christian identity in language and practice.
The relationship between the individual and the collective relationship to faith
Many participants found it hard to separate the two, and many felt that their personal or their organisation's position or tradition was the only one.

- **Relationship between identity and inclusivity**

While inclusivity in service is widely supported, there are differing perspectives on how inclusivity relates to leadership, governance, and organisational identity.

- **Expectations of leadership and organisational practice**

Contributions reflected differing expectations regarding the role of Christian belief in the leadership, staffing, and decision-making of the Movement.

- **Local context and global coherence**

Legal, cultural, and social conditions shape how Christian identity can and may be expressed, raising questions about how a globally connected Movement maintains coherence.

- **Consultation responses and emerging fault lines**

Submissions during the Consultation phase, including those relating to YMCA Canada's Halifax Declaration and subsequent responses to it, revealed significant differences in perspective. These exchanges highlighted existing fault lines and, in some cases, deeper fractures within the Movement regarding Christian identity, expression, and participation in the global YMCA.

4

The Conversation and Consultation revealed that the YMCA Movement is shaped by different generational perspectives, with young people having different approaches from senior leaders

Inputs from the four online Youth Dialogues emphasised themes of authenticity, belonging, and the lived experience of Christian faith, often expressed through relationships, service, and openness.

Some Consultation feedback noted that more recent debates and areas of concern may not fully reflect the perspectives of younger participants, and highlighted the importance of continued attention to the voices of young people in shaping the future of the Movement.

5

IN CONCLUSION

The combined findings of the Conversation and Consultation indicate that, while there is substantial common ground, there are still unresolved issues, and there is not yet sufficient shared understanding to support a single, globally agreed statement of YMCA Christian identity in the 21st Century. We propose two responses which we see as complementary:

Continue the Conversation

First, to talk further about the issues which need further exploration: we list several important potential lines of discussion below, and a series of potential questions in Annex C.

Embrace our Diversity

Second – on top of the first priority to understand better our realities – to go further and to embrace our diversity, making a conscious decision to focus not on what divides but on what unites us as a Movement.

Areas for deeper consideration

So, while this report is presented as a descriptive account of what has been affirmed and acknowledged, it also proposes a way forward. In order to work towards shared understanding, we encourage the Movement to continue to engage in this conversation, and to spend more time learning from one another about why this diversity of Christian expression exists and how it can be better managed and leveraged for those we serve.

In further conversations, as relationships are built and strengthened, we hope greater consideration will be given towards issues including:

- The different legal, financial, historical and cultural realities that inform Christian expression in different contexts
- Developing shared understanding of key concepts, including "Christian identity" and "Christian expression"
- Strengthening the Movement's capacity to recognise and navigate diversity of Christian expression
- Ensuring that the voices of younger generations continue to shape the future of the YMCA

On top of these issues, in Annex C we list a series of questions for potential discussion.

In concluding this stage of our work, we find a Movement that is connected through a shared Christian identity, while diverse in how that identity is expressed.

We have attempted to capture a point in an ongoing process of discernment, rather than a final position, and we offer our findings as a contribution to the YMCA's continuing global conversation.

While we have made every effort to capture, order and re-present our global findings collected over a 3-year period, we fully acknowledge that we may have omitted or misrepresented elements of the Conversation. Any mistakes are not of course intentional.

We note that – even when differences have been aired – the Conversation and the Consultation of the last 3½ years have been hopeful, respectful, and constructive within the 'safe space' that is the YMCA. They have been exciting; they have been enjoyable. They point to a Movement passionate about its place and its work in the world.

We thank all those who have contributed so much, and offer these findings with gratitude, humility, and love for the global YMCA Movement, in the hope that they will serve it well as it continues to discern how to live out its Christian identity in the 21st Century. Our shared task is to imagine and deliver a genuinely and deeply shared future.

ANNEX A I The Conversation (2023–2025)

60+ structured dialogues across 20+ National Movements

A1. Origins & Purpose

The World YMCA Executive Committee initiated the YMCA Christian Identity in the 21st Century project in 2022, recognising a deep need to revisit and articulate what unites a Movement that spans continents, cultures, and faith contexts. It built on earlier frameworks, including the Paris Basis (1855), the Kampala Principles (1973), and Challenge 21 (1998). The project sought to ground contemporary understanding in the Movement's founding Christian identity and convictions.

The Steering Committee, representative of the faith diversity that exists across the Movement, was chosen and empowered to design and lead the project. Its joint exploration of the YMCA's history and current context provided the foundation for the design and approach of a Movement-wide conversation.
It set out clear markers from the outset as to what the Conversation was, and was not.

The Conversation WAS...

- a space for respectful listening and sharing
- an opportunity to explore the YMCA's Christian history and future
- a process that values all voices, including those of other faiths and no faith

The Conversation was NOT...

- about changing any local YMCA's identity or practice
- about removing the C in the YMCA or ignoring the Paris Basis
- a theological debate
- about agreement — it was about understanding

The Christian identity project design envisioned a global conversation that was intended to shape a shared statement on Christian identity. The goal was not to impose but to listen, discern, and identify the living threads that hold the YMCA family together.

A2. Process

Between May and September 2025, more than 60 structured conversations were held across the Movement, online and in person, using a carefully designed framework. Facilitators were selected, trained and provided with resources to ensure conversations were focused and consistent. Each session invited reflection around four core questions:

Q1. What does it mean to be a Christian Movement in 2025?

Q2. How can the YMCA be inclusive of people with Christian faith, other faiths, and no faith?

Q3. How do we manage our collective space as a global Movement with diverse beliefs?

Q4. Share a story or moment that shaped your understanding of YMCA's Christian identity.

National Movements Participating:

Africa
Kenya, Zambia

Asia-Pacific
Hong Kong, India, Philippines, Taiwan (multiple sessions),

Europe
Czech Republic, Germany, Norway (~3,000 participants), Scotland

The Americas
Argentina, Colombia, United States (incl. Women's conversations)

Middle East
East Jerusalem (two conversations)

4 dedicatedonlineYouth Dialogues:
twice in English (East/West hemispheres)|once in French | once in Spanish

The Conversation also included four dedicated and well attended online Youth Dialogues: twice in English (for the East and West hemispheres), once in French and once in Spanish, ensuring the integral voice of young leaders from across the Movement was heard. It also drew over 150 individual responses. We estimate that some 700 people took part overall.

ANNEX A | Spirit of the Conversations & Global Themes

A3. The Spirit of the Conversations

Facilitators consistently described the conversations as spaces of honesty, respect, humility, and hope. Participants approached identity not as an argument to win, but a story to share. The tone was both reflective and forward-looking, with participants expressing a desire for faithfulness, openness, and continued discernment.

> *"One youth leader noted it felt less like a meeting and more like a sacred space where we were all allowed to be human."*

A4. Global themes & insights

A4.1 Christian identity in the 21st Century

Across much of the Movement, participants in the Conversation reaffirmed that the YMCA's foundation remains Christian, while acknowledging that its language and expression are evolving in response to the moral and cultural realities of the 21st Century. Many participants described the importance of expressing Christian faith through love, service, and justice, alongside its theological foundations. A recurring theme was that Christian faith is most credible when it is embodied, when the YMCA's actions reflect the love, justice, and compassion of Jesus Christ in daily life.

"... solid at the core, open attheedges."

"The first day I came to the YMCA, I didn't know about anything about YMCA... The only thing I knew, YMCA is a Christian organization. And I got a job at YMCA as a program coordinator. I'm Christian too. I want to do something for the YMCA because I want to do something for the kingdom of GOD. This is a best way to serve to GOD." (Asia Pacific Youth)

The conversations highlighted that, for many participants, the integrity of practice is closely connected to the credibility of Christian faith. Some participants, particularly in European and North American contexts, described operating in largely secular or multi-faith environments where overt religious language may not always be easily received or understood. In these settings, Christian identity, while remaining core, was often expressed in the first instance through service, fairness, and inclusion, alongside other forms of witness.

"The YMCA can be spiritually obvious without being obnoxious." (Online response)

In other contexts, including parts of Africa and Asia, participants described comfort with more explicit expressions of Christian faith, including open prayer, devotion, and scripture as natural parts of organisational life. At the same time, many emphasised that such expressions should remain relational and hospitable.

The Indian national dialogue recalled the YMCA's mediating role during a period of inter-religious violence in Hyderabad in the 1990s as a living example of Christianity enacted through peacebuilding rather than proclamation.

Some East Asian contributions, including from Hong Kong and Taiwan, described the importance of expressing and sharing Christian faith in ways that are meaningful within their local contexts, including through community engagement, Alpha courses, mentoring, and care for vulnerable groups.

Across the contributions, participants often connected these expressions to the Movement's history, linking YMCA Founder George Williams' call to "extend God's Kingdom" with contemporary commitments to human dignity and justice. While expressed in different ways, many contributions reflected a desire to remain rooted in Christ while engaging meaningfully with the realities of the present.

A4.2 Inclusivity

Inclusivity emerged as one of the most consistent and emotionally resonant themes across the global conversations. Participants described it not as a soft value but as a discipline of Christian faith, expressed in the act of welcoming others as Christ welcomed. In many contexts, leaders affirmed that the YMCA's strength lies in its ability to hold space for people of different faiths, beliefs, and life experiences within a shared purpose.

"To be a Christian Movement today means being open, humble, and deeply relational, not defined solely by dogma, but by a willingness to walk with others through their spiritual questions. A Movement that listens first and trusts God with the rest." (Hong Kong)

Groups in India, East Jerusalem, and Taiwan reflected on how inclusivity is lived within their contexts. In India, interfaith dialogue and cooperation described as an expression of Christian witness in a plural society, while participants in East Jerusalem highlighted the YMCA's credibility as a bridge-builder among Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities. Contributions from Taiwan described the use of language such as compassion, justice, and service as ways of expressing Christian faith in contexts where different beliefs are present.

Some participants, including in parts of Europe and North America, noted that explicit religious language may not always be easily received in certain contexts, and described expressing Christian identity through service, relationships, and inclusion alongside other forms of witness. Some participants described community outreach and youth empowerment as expressions of a "faith that unites, not divides".

"Intentional space for other faith inclusion even in strong Christian Y contexts... e.g. Bangladesh where 10,000+ connect with the Y through Soccer – mostly from other faith backgrounds." (Asia Pacific Youth)

Despite the shared aspiration to be inclusive, a number of contributions emphasised the importance of ensuring that inclusivity does not come at the expense of a clearly articulated Christian identity. Different perspectives were often expressed in relation to the leadership of the YMCA, with some advocating for leadership that reflects a diversity of faith perspectives, and others emphasising the importance of maintaining Christian leadership.

"Inclusivity does not mean abandoning our Christian identity; rather, it means expressing that identity in a way that reflects Christ's openness and love." (Online response)

Some contributions, including those connected to the Halifax Declaration (covered in A5.6), and subsequent responses to it (A5.7), highlighted differing views on how inclusivity and Christian identity should be held together within the global Movement.

Across the contributions, many participants described inclusivity as an expression of their Christian faith, rooted in the example of Christ's openness and love. At the same time, some contributions raised questions about how inclusivity should be understood in relation to a clearly articulated Christian identity, particularly where concerns were expressed about maintaining theological clarity and continuity. Taken together, these perspectives reflect both a strong commitment to inclusion and an ongoing conversation about how it is best held alongside the Movement's Christian foundation.

A4.3 Unity in diversity

Across many contributions, participants described the YMCA's unity as grounded in a shared purpose and values, even where there is not uniformity of belief. The principle of local autonomy was widely described as an important strength of the Movement. Many contributions emphasised that the global identity of the YMCA is shaped by the ability of National Movements to express Christian faith within their own contexts, while remaining connected to a shared moral and spiritual foundation.

Many contributions highlighted the Paris Basis as central to understanding the Christian identity of the Movement, while others emphasised the person and ministry of Jesus Christ as the primary point of reference. Many described local autonomy as enabling the YMCA to remain both contextually relevant and globally connected.
"In such a diverse and evolving world, it's important to lead by example of Christian values. For me that means leading with love, understanding, inclusivity, and humanity." (Online response)

Participants described unity in a variety of ways, including through shared mission, service, mutual respect, and collaboration. The conversations themselves were often referenced as an example of how unity can be expressed in practice across a diverse Movement.

The YMCA Canada Halifax Declaration and the response to it from several central European YMCAs relating to Christian identity (A5.6, A5.7) underscores an ongoing question within the Movement: how local autonomy can be held alongside a shared Christian identity and a sense of global connection.

Across the contributions, unity was often described as relational as well as structural, expressed through ongoing connection, dialogue, and shared commitment. While perspectives differ, most participants reflected a desire to remain connected as a global Movement, even as they continue to discern how Christian identity is understood and expressed in different contexts.

A4.4 Christian faith in action

Across many conversations, participants described Christian identity as closely connected to serving others through justice, empathy, and practical action. Kenya, the Philippines, the Americas, and East Jerusalem provided examples of community programmes for youth employment, interfaith reconciliation efforts, and health and education initiatives as expressions of the YMCA's Christian calling.

"The YMCA was the first Palestinian organization to work with the Palestinian refugees in 1948 in a refugee camp in Jericho. We supported them although they were almost all Muslims. This was driven by the Christian values of love and compassion." (East Jerusalem)

In a range of contexts, participants described service as a form of witness, where Christian belief is expressed through action. Some contributions connected this to social transformation, including responses to poverty, injustice, and inequality, while others described it in terms of ethics, human dignity, and community life. In Latin America, leaders connected Christian faith in action with social transformation.

"The YMCA of Argentina defines itself as a Christian, open, pluralistic, ecumenical, and interfaith organization that embraces human diversity not as a difficulty but as an essential asset for community life." (Argentina)

Across the contributions, many participants described Christian faith in action as central to how the YMCA understands and expresses its Christian identity. These perspectives reflect a strong emphasis on lived Christian faith, while also pointing to ongoing reflection about how action, belief, and identity are held together across different contexts.

A4.5 Youth perspectives

Across the four regional Youth Dialogues, young participants described Christian identity in language that was relational, inclusive, and hopeful. They spoke about love, belonging, authenticity, and curiosity, alongside reflections on Christian faith and practice. For many, Christian faith was experienced not as a static belief but as a living practice expressed through community, service, and shared humanity.

"Love as our operational anchor", "Don't tell me about Christ, show me Jesus", and "Our life may be the only Bible some people ever read" expressed youth expectations for how YMCA can live out its Christian identity.

"One example is happening right now as I complete the survey. I am in a forest in the Czech Republic with members of YMCAs from 19 different countries, 170 young people of other faith, and of no faith, and all drawn to the life example and teaching of Jesus." (Czech Republic)

Participants described the YMCA as a rare environment where they could explore spirituality without fear of judgment. In several dialogues, young leaders emphasised psychological safety, and the freedom to express doubt and diversity within a Christian faith-rooted setting.

Many youth participants linked Christian faith to action and social relevance: care for creation, mental health, gender equality, and peacebuilding. These concerns grounded spirituality in the real struggles of their generation. Latin American participants described the YMCA as providing a Christian faith that listens before it speaks, capturing the humility and empathy that young voices believe must define the Movement's future.

Across the youth contributions, there was a strong emphasis on authenticity, openness, and lived expression of Christian faith. These perspectives reflect both continuity with the YMCA's Christian foundation and a desire to express that identity in ways that are meaningful to younger generations.

ANNEX A | A5. Regional Insights

AFRICA

African conversations displayed a commitment to both deep Christian faith and committed service, where Christianity and community development were inseparable. The YMCA was consistently described as both a moral compass and social anchor, providing stability in times of crisis and hope in contexts of poverty or conflict. Participants from Kenya and Zambia reflected on the YMCA's credibility as a trusted partner in peacebuilding, intergenerational mentoring, and education. Christian faith, they said, must be felt through compassion and fairness. And Christian faith must also be nurtured and cherished as a core distinguishing marker for the YMCA.

"Of 176 respondents (survey and face to face) there was 100% "unanimous agreement that the YMCA should retain or strengthen its Christian foundation." (Kenya)

Themes of dignity, resilience, and collective responsibility were strong, mirroring the broader African ethos that spirituality is communal. Across the region, there was little tension between Christian faith and inclusivity; both were seen as mutually reinforcing expressions of the Gospel.

ASIA PACIFIC

Asia-Pacific conversations explored how Christian faith and interfaith coexistence can thrive together. In India, participants recalled the YMCA's mediating role during Hindu–Muslim riots as a living example of Christian identity embodied in reconciliation. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, discussions centred on contextual theology regarding how Christian values can be expressed in diverse cultural and multi-faith societies through a shared vocabulary of service, justice, and hospitality as expressions of Christian faith in those contexts.

"The YMCA was described as a space that integrates faith into all pillars of Mission 2030, striving to authentically 'live the 'C' in YMCA.' The Christian identity is seen as something lived through everyday acts - helping others, speaking kindly, and being an example of Christ-like behaviour. Participants acknowledged the challenges of being overtly expressive about faith due to language sensitivities and social restrictions but also saw it as a chance to be quietly confident and rooted in God's word, letting actions speak louder than words." (India)

Participants emphasised the use of values such as service, justice, and hospitality as a way of engaging with people of other or no faith, while remaining grounded in Christian identity. Contributions also highlighted the importance of expressing Christian faith through community engagement, advocacy, and everyday practice, alongside other forms of Christian witness.

EUROPE

Conversations across European YMCAs reflected a strong desire to remain rooted in Christian identity while embracing inclusivity with clarity and confidence. Participants described Christian identity as something demonstrated through actions such as hospitality, service, and relational care, alongside its theological foundations.

In the Czech Republic, the group emphasized that Christian identity must not be erased or diluted in the name of inclusion, cautioning against affiliation with organisations that have abandoned their Christian foundation.

In Norway, participants saw the YMCA's Christian grounding as central to its mission, with ecumenical openness.

Scottish conversations highlighted the importance of clear and transparent articulation of Christian identity and values within an inclusive global Movement.

In Germany, the Paris Basis remained a foundational anchor, with participants affirming its role in shaping Christian expression while also welcoming ecumenical and interfaith engagement.

Participants across Europe affirmed the importance of being clear about "who we are" while creating space for others to belong, describing their role as stewards of a shared Christian heritage.

THE AMERICAS

Across North and South America, the Christian identity of the YMCA was often expressed through social justice, community empowerment, and youth inclusion.

In the United States, a key theme many identified was the complex challenge of how to contextualize the historical YMCA Christian mission in modern-day society. Many conversations revolved around living out the Christian faith in word and deed in our YMCAs through practical compassion, supporting marginalised communities and creating spaces of belonging for those who feel excluded from traditional religion.

In Argentina and other Latin American movements, participants highlighted the intersection of Christian faith and social transformation: to serve is to believe.

YMCA Colombia emphasised service, solidarity, and lived Christian values as the core of identity in their context.

Generational dialogue featured strongly, as younger voices urged the YMCA to translate its Christian foundation into tangible advocacy for justice, environment, and mental health. This emphasis on lived expression of Christian faith reflects continuity with the Paris Basis, extending God's Kingdom through compassionate engagement with the world.

MIDDLE EAST

In the Middle East, the conversations centred in East Jerusalem revealed a profound expression of Christian identity shaped by context, coexistence, and courage. Participants described the YMCA as a safe and sacred space where Christians, Muslims, and Jews come together not despite their faiths, but because of them. The YMCA's Christian witness was understood as a steady presence amid uncertainty, conflict, and division. That it is a peace lived, not just preached.

Christian faith in this region was expressed through healing, reconciliation, and human dignity. Participants shared how the YMCA's trauma recovery work, youth empowerment, and bridge-building initiatives have given tangible meaning to Christian service. The organisation's credibility, they said, comes from living Christ's message of peace in environments where faith is often politicised or weaponised.

A5.7 A discussion paper presented by several Central European YMCAs in response to the Halifax Declaration

YMCA Movements from the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, and Slovakia submitted a joint Discussion Paper in response to YMCA Canada's Halifax Declaration. Their statement reaffirmed: the Paris Basis as the foundational and unifying anchor of the global YMCA; the belief that Christian identity and inclusivity are not mutually exclusive concerns; the view that fully abandoning Christian identity risks breaking continuity with the historic YMCA Movement; the view that the "C" cannot be reduced to a merely historical reference without altering the nature of the YMCA itself.

Their paper also raised questions about what constitutes the essential minimum for participating in the global Movement, and whether a YMCA that no longer identifies as Christian can still be considered fully aligned with the core of the global family.

This central European response received expressions of support from YMCAs in Belarus, Hong Kong, and Greece, among others, who affirmed the importance of retaining Christian foundations within the broader commitment to inclusion.

ANNEX A | A6. Responses to the four core questions posed by the Conversation

A6.1 What does it mean to be a Christian Movement in 2024?

Across the conversations, participants described being a Christian Movement in a variety of ways. Many emphasised the importance of living out Christian faith through service, justice, compassion, and inclusion in daily life, alongside expressions of belief, worship, and community. Christian faith was often described as something to be embodied in practice as well as articulated in belief.

"We are a Christian organization, not an organization of Christians." (USA)

In a range of contexts, participants described the Christian Movement as a force for transformation, expressed through service, social justice, and engagement with communities facing inequality, youth unemployment, and violence. Some contributions highlighted the importance of compassion as a form of Christian witness. Other contributions emphasised the importance of expressing Christian identity in ways that are meaningful within local contexts. This included reflecting on how Christian faith is communicated in multi-faith or secular environments, and how Christian belief is expressed through both language and action.

The four online Youth Dialogues reinforced the importance of lived faith, describing the YMCA as a space where Christian faith is explored through inclusion, service, and relationships. For many young participants, being Christian involved reflecting on how love is expressed in action as well as in belief.

Taken together, the responses reflect a broad (though not unanimous) understanding of the YMCA today as a Christian Movement expressed through both belief and practice. While many participants emphasised the importance of lived Christian faith in action, others highlighted the need for clear articulation of Christian belief and identity. These perspectives point to a shared widespread commitment to Christ-centred purpose, alongside ongoing reflection about how that identity is best understood and expressed in different contexts.

A6.2 How can the YMCA be inclusive of people with Christian faith, other faiths, and no faith?

Across the conversations, inclusivity was described as an important dimension of how many participants understand the YMCA's Christian identity. Many contributions emphasised welcoming, serving, and respecting people of different faiths and backgrounds, often referencing Christ's example of hospitality and love.

"Lead by our core values, treat people with dignity and respect, behave as Christ behaved, core values are behaviour driven." (USA)

In a range of contexts, participants shared practical examples of how inclusivity is expressed. These included interfaith dialogue, community programmes, and spaces where people of different beliefs can engage with one another. Some contributions described approaches to Christian faith exploration that are invitational and discussion-based, allowing participants to engage at their own pace.

Other contributions highlighted the importance of being attentive to context, including recognising that expressions of Christian faith such as prayer or worship may be received differently in different settings. In these cases, inclusivity was described in terms of respect, sensitivity, and creating space for participation without compulsion.
At the same time, a number of contributions emphasised the importance of ensuring that inclusivity does not lead to a loss of clarity about the YMCA's Christian foundation. These perspectives highlighted the need to hold together openness and a clearly articulated Christian identity, particularly in relation to leadership, language, and organisational practice.

Taken together, the responses reflect a strong commitment to inclusivity across the Movement, alongside differing perspectives on how it should be understood and practised. While many participants described inclusivity as an expression of Christian faith, others emphasised the importance of maintaining theological clarity and continuity, pointing to an ongoing process of discernment about how these commitments are held together.

A6.3 How do we manage our collective space as a global Movement with diverse beliefs?

"The million dollar question for someone at a higher pay grade than me to figure out!" (USA)

Across the conversations, participants described a range of approaches to managing diversity within a global Christian Movement. Many emphasised the importance of shared values, mutual respect, and flexibility in local expression. The YMCA was often described as a space where people of different beliefs and traditions collaborate around a shared purpose, even where theological perspectives differ.

The conversations identified the common ethical ground of love, justice, inclusion, and service. These values were often understood as the practical embodiment of the YMCA's Christian identity, allowing a diverse Movement to act together without erasing local distinctiveness. Participants also emphasised the importance of clarity of purpose, alongside flexibility in how that purpose is expressed in different contexts.

In East Jerusalem, participants captured this principle powerfully: to manage diversity is to create belonging without hierarchy. In contexts of inter-religious tension, they emphasised the importance of shared mission and empathy over doctrinal debate. The YMCA's ability to offer programmes for people of different faiths while remaining rooted in Christian faith was viewed as a tangible expression of reconciliation.

In Hong Kong, participants highlighted the innovative design of "non-church-based faith spaces" as reflection areas open to all, and #TAGS (The Advocators' Gathering Space), an initiative allowing people to explore Christian faith and meaning without pressure or proselytising. Participants described these approaches as models for how the Movement can nurture genuine curiosity about Christian faith, in plural settings.

Other regions echoed this balance. In Europe and the Americas, leaders emphasised the importance of dialogue, shared governance, and transparent communication to maintain cohesion across diverse theological and cultural landscapes. African participants added that hospitality and storytelling serve as cultural tools to bridge differences while keeping Christ's example at the centre.

Taken together, the responses reflect a shared concern with how to sustain unity across diversity within the global Movement. While many participants described approaches grounded in shared values and relationships, others emphasised the importance of maintaining clear Christian identity and coherence. These perspectives point to an ongoing process of discernment about how the YMCA manages its collective space across different contexts.

Across the Movement, managing collective space is understood as an act of Christian faith in itself. Creating communities that embody justice, hospitality, and belonging as signs of God's inclusive love.

"This incarnated faith does not seek to exclude or convince, but to engage in dialogue. It recognizes that there are multiple paths - religious, philosophical, or ethical - that lead to a shared commitment to justice, respect for life, and social transformation. The Christian spirituality that inspires our actions can coexist with other deeply held convictions that share this same vocation of care and collective responsibility" (Argentina)

A6.4 Share a story or moment that shaped your understanding of YMCA's Christian identity

Participants offered hundreds of personal accounts that illuminated the heart of the YMCA's Christian identity not as a concept, but as a lived reality. These stories cut across geography and language and many reflected Christian faith expressed through presence, compassion, and courage.

One participant from East Jerusalem recalled how, during moments of violence, the YMCA became a shelter for peace, remaining open when most other institutions closed. Staff provided trauma care for children and support for families on both sides of the conflict.

From India, the retelling of the YMCA's role as mediator during the Hindu–Muslim riots in Hyderabad in the 1990s surfaced repeatedly. Participants described this as a defining moment of Christian witness, faith expressed as moral courage and impartial compassion, where reconciliation was lived rather than preached.

In Taiwan, stories captured the gentler rhythms of Christian service. Shared prayers over meals, volunteers comforting the sick, and young leaders showing up to help families in need. A youth participant described the YMCA as "faith with open hands". A place where belonging precedes belief.

Participants from the United States shared stories of companionship and resilience. One woman recounted how YMCA staff organised daily check-ins for isolated seniors during the pandemic. Another told of volunteers helping families rebuild after hurricanes.

From Kenya and Zambia, Christian faith was described in action-oriented terms, as a commitment to youth empowerment, moral leadership, and service that bridges difference.

Stories from Hong Kong and Norway offered quieter moments: prayer before meetings, reflection circles for youth, and teams choosing collaboration over conflict. One Norwegian participant summed it up simply: "Our faith lives in how we treat each other at work."

Across these stories, a number of common themes can be observed. Many participants described Christian faith as something experienced through action and relationship, including moments of presence in times of crisis, efforts to build reconciliation across difference, and everyday acts of care within communities.

Several contributions highlighted the importance of remaining present in difficult circumstances, while others emphasised the role of courage, service, and compassion in expressing Christian identity. Some stories reflected large-scale responses to conflict or disaster, while others focused on quieter, relational expressions of Christian faith in daily life.

Taken together, these accounts illustrate the diversity of ways in which Christian identity is experienced and expressed across the Movement. While the forms vary, many participants described a connection between Christian faith and action, and the importance of living out Christian belief in ways that are visible and meaningful within their local contexts.

ANNEX B | The Consultation (February–March 2026)

20 formal responses from National Movements and stakeholders

B1. Overview of the Consultation

Following the Global Conversation (2023–2025), a Consultation phase was undertaken between February and March 2026. National Movements and other stakeholders were invited to provide formal responses to a draft 35-page Summary Report on the Conversation (December 2025) (which has subsequently been edited and now appears here as Annex A), and a draft 5-page Summary on where the Steering Committee felt the Movement had landed, including a draft Declaration on Christian identity (January 2026)

A substantial number of submissions focussed on and engaged directly with the language, structure, and implications of this draft Declaration.

The draft Declaration underlined the Christian foundation and continuing identity of the 21st Century YMCA, as well as its inclusiveness and the application of its Christian identity in upholding shared values and in serving young people and communities, and especially the most vulnerable.

In summary: while many affirmed the work done, its content and its direction, others expressed serious concerns, including from a significant number who felt that it was not explicit enough in its articulation of Christian identity.

While the Conversation phase was characterised by facilitated dialogue, storytelling, and broad participation, the Consultation phase introduced a different mode of engagement. Contributions were generally more formal and considered, often reflecting organisational or collectively developed positions.

In addition to invited formal submissions, a range of informal contributions were also received, including individual reflections, correspondence, and responses shared through less structured channels.

Some contributors to the Consultation phase had not participated in the earlier Conversation process, and were responding primarily to the draft outputs and the wider discussions which the Conversation had generated. As a result, the Consultation phase both extended and reshaped the process, introducing additional perspectives and surfacing areas of concern that had not been fully expressed during the earlier Conversation phase.

The following National Movements made submissions:

Africa	Asia Pacific	Americas	Europe	Middle East
Cameroon, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Hong Kong (in association with Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Macau, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand – India also responded separately)	Argentina,Canada,Colombia	Germany,Scotland	East Jerusalem

One individual (Rev Dr Sam Stephens, formerly of YMCA India, World YMCA and YMCA Asia Pacific) sent a lengthy reflection which also included a proposed alternative declaration.

B2. Participation, engagement and response patterns, and differentiation between the Conversation and the Consultation

A notable feature of the Consultation phase was the emergence of aligned or coordinated responses. In several instances, shared perspectives were articulated across multiple Movements or contexts, reflecting common theological or organisational positions. These patterns of alignment suggest that engagement during the Consultation phase was shaped not only by geography or governance structures, but also by shared convictions and interpretive frameworks.

At times, the content of these coordinated responses differed from submissions made separately and individually, by the signatories.

In contrast to the relational and exploratory tone of the Conversation phase, the Consultation phase reflected a more defined and, at times, more positional form of engagement. Contributions frequently engaged directly with specific elements of the draft materials, offering affirmations, clarifications, and, in some cases, substantive challenges.

A further distinction can be observed between the more open, exploratory, and often personal tone of youth engagement during the Conversation phase, and the more structured, collectively developed, and, at times, more formally articulated responses received during the Consultation phase. This reflects not only differences in format, but also differences in how various parts of the Movement engage with questions of identity, theology, and organisational practice.

B3. Areas of convergence

Across the Consultation inputs, several areas of broad alignment were evident.

There was clear and widespread affirmation that the YMCA is a Christian Movement, grounded in its historical foundations and continuing into its present reality. References to the Paris Basis (1855), the Kampala Principles (1973), and Challenge 21 (1998) were consistently cited as enduring points of reference for the Movement's identity.

Many contributions also emphasised that Christian identity is expressed not only in belief, but in action. Service, justice, compassion, and community engagement were widely described as central to how faith is lived within the YMCA across diverse contexts. There was also strong support for the YMCA's commitment to inclusivity in its engagement with communities. Contributors broadly affirmed that the Movement is open to people of different faiths and of no faith, and that this openness is, for many, understood as an expression of Christian faith.

B4. Areas of divergence and the need for clarification

Alongside these areas of convergence, the Consultation phase surfaced a number of important differences in perspective, as well as areas where clarification was sought.

A recurring theme across several submissions was the question of Christological clarity. Some respondents expressed concern that the draft Declaration did not sufficiently articulate the centrality of Jesus Christ, particularly in comparison to the explicit language of the Paris Basis. In these contributions, there was a strong emphasis on ensuring that expressions of service, shared values, and inclusivity are clearly understood as flowing from faith in Jesus Christ, rather than being interpreted as a substitute for it.

Other contributions supported a broader articulation of Christian identity that emphasises lived faith and shared values, while remaining rooted in the Christian tradition. These differing perspectives reflect not a disagreement about the importance of Christian identity, but differing expectations regarding how it should be expressed and communicated.

The language of the draft Declaration was also a focus of feedback. Some contributors considered the language to be too general or insufficiently distinct, raising concerns that it could weaken clarity or lead to misinterpretation. Others valued language that could be held across diverse contexts and expressions, particularly in a global Movement.

Questions also emerged around the use and implications of the term "secular". Contributors raised differing views on whether and how this term should be understood within the YMCA context, and what constitutes sufficient connection to Christian identity for belonging within the global Movement.

Related to this, differing perspectives were evident regarding the relationship between Christian identity and inclusiveness. While there was broad agreement that both are essential, views differed on how this relationship should be articulated, and the extent to which inclusiveness is understood as flowing from, or defining, Christian identity.

Consultation responses also highlighted that the outputs of the Conversation phase may not have fully reflected the depth of Christian belief held within some National Movements. In these cases, contributors emphasised that lived expressions of faith, particularly those expressed through service and community engagement, should be understood as grounded in an underlying theological foundation.

Regional responses further cautioned against over-generalisation. In Europe, for example, feedback noted that the limited number of national conversations may not fully capture the diversity of experience across the region, and questioned some of the language used to describe regional patterns. More broadly, contributors emphasised that differences in expression should not be understood as fixed regional characteristics, but as shaped by a range of contextual factors.

B5. Understanding diversity, alignment, and Movement dynamics

The Consultation phase reinforced the distinction between Christian identity and Christian expression, while also bringing greater visibility to how diversity within the Movement is experienced and navigated. Across submissions, there was recognition that while the YMCA shares a common Christian identity, there is significant diversity in how that identity is expressed in practice. These expressions reflect differences in theological tradition, cultural context, organisational history, and social environment.

At the same time, the Consultation phase highlighted that this diversity is not only expressed geographically, but also relationally and theologically. In several instances, alignment occurred across contexts based on shared perspectives or concerns, rather than national or regional affiliation.

This suggests that diversity within the Movement operates along multiple dimensions, including theology, context, and organisational practice, and that differences are not always easily mapped along regional lines. Challenges can therefore arise from differing expectations about how diversity should be recognised, articulated, and held within a globally connected Movement.

ANNEX C | A proposed way forward, with some possible questions to be addressed

Questions for ongoing discernment across the Movement

The Global Conversation (2023–2025) and the subsequent Consultation phase (February–March 2026) have together provided a significant body of input from across the YMCA Movement.

Through this process, there has been clear and widespread affirmation that the YMCA is a Christian Movement, grounded in its shared history and continuing into its present reality.

At the same time, the process has highlighted the diversity of ways in which this identity is understood and expressed across different contexts. It has also surfaced a number of areas where perspectives differ, particularly in relation to the articulation of Christian identity, the relationship between identity and inclusiveness, and the language used to describe both.

Taken together, the Conversation and Consultation phases suggest that the work of understanding and articulating Christian identity within the YMCA is not complete, and is best understood as an ongoing Movement-wide process of discernment. The process has not resolved all areas of difference, but it has clarified the questions that require continued engagement.

In this light, the Steering Committee proposes that the Movement continue this conversation, creating space for both relational and organisational forms of engagement, and ensuring broad participation across regions, generations, and contexts, and especially among young people.

1. How might the YMCA articulate its Christian identity in ways that are both faithful to its foundations and meaningful across diverse cultural and religious contexts?

2. How does the Movement understand the relationship between "Christian identity" and "inclusiveness", particularly where some see inclusiveness as an expression of Christian faith, and others view it in tension with a clear Christian identity?

3. How can the Movement develop a shared understanding around key terms such as "Christian identity", "inclusiveness", and "secular", where differences often arise not only from positions, but from the meaning attached to these terms?

4. What does the Movement feel constitutes the essential elements of Christian identity within a Movement which is globally connected yet locally autonomous?

5. How does the Movement feel that YMCA Christian identity can or should be expressed in contexts where Christians are a minority, and where this shapes how faith can be articulated and practised?

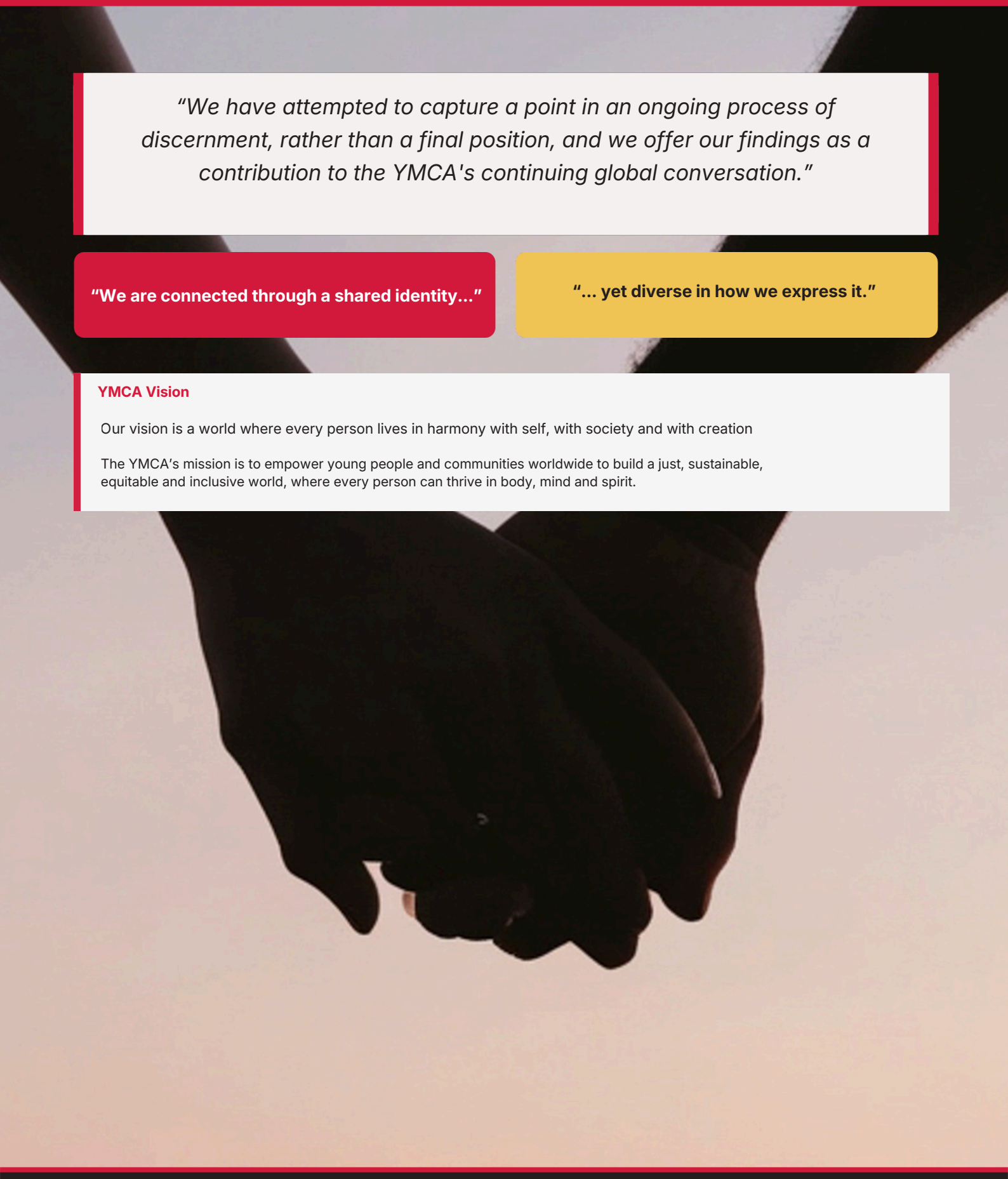
6. How can the Movement converge on the articulation of shared values — whether understood as Christian or universal — and how they are expressed across different cultural settings?

7. How can the Movement ensure that the voices of young people can continue to shape the future expression of Christian identity within the YMCA?

The next phase of this work will require continued engagement across the Movement, recognising both the strength of its shared identity and the complexity of expressing that identity across a diverse and dynamic global community.

Thank you

Thank you ... to all who have contributed to this global Movement-wide Conversation



"We have attempted to capture a point in an ongoing process of discernment, rather than a final position, and we offer our findings as a contribution to the YMCA's continuing global conversation."

"We are connected through a shared identity..."

"... yet diverse in how we express it."

YMCA Vision

Our vision is a world where every person lives in harmony with self, with society and with creation

The YMCA's mission is to empower young people and communities worldwide to build a just, sustainable, equitable and inclusive world, where every person can thrive in body, mind and spirit.