



Churches welcoming refugees in Europe

Germany is on course to receive over one million asylum seekers in 2015. The Evangelical Reformed Church's moderator, Martin Heimbucher, encouraged volunteers not to relent in their efforts, saying, "Yes we can do it!" and reminded the church's synod "the Old and the New Testament give a strong impetus for welcoming the stranger to our country in a fair and humane way."

The Church of Lippe has been engaged in refugee work for some time. The state of North Rhine Westphalia received nearly 160,000 refugees before September—and another 60,000 alone that month.

"The parishes of our church are very much engaged together with ecumenical partners and people who are not a member of a church to show in a very practical way that the refugees are welcome," said Dietmar Arends, moderator of the church.

While individual congregations are meeting specific needs of refugees in their communities, the greater church's work is focused in two main areas: counseling and integration. "In this [latter] regard schools and kindergartens are playing an important role. In our church we have about 60 kindergartens and also the school pastors and teachers for religious education are very much involved in the issue of integration, intercultural questions and so on," said Arends. "Therefore they are working with international classes."

"The situation right now is difficult but we all try to work together and to encourage each other to get involved in projects so that refugees could find in our country what they

are looking for—safety and shelter," Arends concluded.

As the number of transiting refugees surged through **Hungary** this summer, the country's government moved to close its borders. Even through that political crisis the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH) and its Refugee Mission continued "to provide assistance, comfort and fellowship to anyone in need regardless of nationality, race, religion or social position."

The Refugee Mission's three main activities provide rent subsidies to families, schooling to teenagers and language and skills training to women. It goes much deeper than that, however, as social workers assist the families to find employment, weave them through the maze of governmental bureaucracy and settle them into their new home.

Responding to the government's policies, the General Convent of the RCH issued a statement declaring, "The biblical commandment of solidarity is unconditional. 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18): this applies to everyone, because all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 27). ...Our church's inescapable task is to help people in need: those fleeing from direct threat to life and those coming simply in the hope of a better life. We must help those who are practicing Christianity and those of other faiths..."

Italy and Greece are the two main EU countries where refugees first enter Europe—making the often deadly journey across the Mediterranean Sea (where more than 3,500 people have died this year alone). The Synod of the Waldensian

and Methodist Churches in Italy has taken the refugee issue very personally stating, "In the face of the migrant, in addition to seeing the face of our Lord, we recognise also expressions and sufferings of our own mothers and fathers who underwent persecution and massacre."

Besides providing assistance to immigrants in Italy, the church has joined in an ecumenical effort to create a "humanitarian corridor" for refugees in Africa. It's a simple yet profound change in approach. Instead of risking their lives to reach Europe, asylum seekers apply at the Italian embassy in Morocco. If accepted, the Italian government pays for safe transportation to Italy. Upon reaching Italy, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (of which the Waldensian Church is a member) and the Community of Sant'Egidio provide the refugees with up to three months of intensive assistance. Launched as a pilot project this year, it is hoped that proven success will lead to rapid growth.

"Historically, the church has been known as a place for people in need to find refuge and sanctuary," said JJ TenClay, a social action worker sent by the Reformed Church in America working in Palermo, Italy. "It is fitting, therefore, that the church is leading the way in finding and implementing humane and just assistance for today's refugees. After all, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, was once a refugee as well."

Next issue: a look at refugee assistance in other parts of the world.

Partnership helps Myanmar flood recovery

The worst flooding in decades hit Myanmar (Burma) over the summer, displacing tens of thousands of people and destroying homes, infrastructure and crops.

Rain began at the end of June, accelerated in July, when it rained continuously for more than two



weeks, and then tropical storm Komen arrived, dumping more than a metre of water in a few days.

Flash floods and landslides joined saturated fields and bursting rivers to devastate large parts of the country. All inter-city transportation in Chin state stopped for nearly a month because roads and suspension bridges were destroyed. Thousands of acres of crops were lost in several states.

“Many villages and towns along the Chindwin and Ayerwaddy riv-



ers were submersed under water,” reported Rev. Dr. Chan Thleng, general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar (CRCM), a member of the WCRC. “The capital city of Chin state has been deteriorated by landslides, and half of the city needs to be moved to a new place.”

The CRCM’s missionaries found themselves in the middle of the disaster, even losing their homes, but quickly began to help. To enhance the flow of aid into the country, the CRCM formed the Myanmar Mercy Foundation with other denominations and non-profit organizations.



The WCRC’s Reformed Partnership Fund responded to their request for financial assistance, as did other ecumenical partners. The Reformed Partnership Fund makes grants of up to €10,000 to support member churches in responding to natural or human-made disasters.

“With the gifts from our church friends around the world and from our church members the urgent relief was distributed to the affected areas,” reported Chan. “Our pastors have gone to these places bringing them these urgent aids.” The aid included rice, dried noodles, cooking oil, blankets, plastic and corrugated metal sheets, cooking and eating utensils, books for children and clothes.



One shipment of aid—which included 300 50kg bags of rice and noodle packs—were trucked as far as possible into the southern part of Chin state. They were then transferred to 40 canoes that rowed against the current up the Lemro River and finally delivered to disaster victims who could do nothing but wait for help to arrive.

“Thank you for your help in the name of our Lord to those who desperately need help,” said Chan. He also noted that while short term relief efforts have ended, recovery work continues.



Learn more about the Reformed Partnership Fund at wrc.ch/mission/partnership-fund/. Donations to its Emergency Assistance fund are welcome and can be made through wrc.ch/donate.

Ziel des anglikanisch-reformierten Dialogs ist die Vertiefung der Gemeinschaft

„Gemeinschaft“ war das Thema des ersten Dialogs seit über 30 Jahren zwischen den Weltgemeinschaften der Anglikaner und der Reformierten.

Von diesem Dialog wird erwartet, dass er „ein besseres gegenseitiges Verständnis in einer Zeit schnellen Wandels zur Folge haben wird, sowie ein besseres Verständnis von uns selber und bessere Lösungen zur Überwindung von Gegensätzen, damit wir uns besser auf das konzentrieren lernen, was am wichtigsten ist, nämlich das Evangelium Jesu Christi in der heutigen Zeit zu verkündigen“, sagte Iain Torrance, der ehemalige Präsident des Princeton Theological Seminary und frühere Moderator der Church of Scotland.

Das erste Treffen stand unter dem Thema „Das Wesen der Gemeinschaft“ und nahm auf den neutestamentlichen Begriff der *koinonia* Bezug, der das Wesen der Beziehungen zwischen Kirchen beschreibt. Die Sichtweise von Gemeinschaft, die in der Studie des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen „Die Kirche: Auf dem Weg zu einer gemeinsamen Vision“ zum Ausdruck kommt, hat in den Gesprächen eine bedeutende Rolle gespielt.

„Was mir besonders gefallen hat und was gewissermaßen ein Höhepunkt gewesen ist, war unser aller Verlangen danach, Gemeinschaft als eine Gabe Gottes zu verstehen, die wir ganz konkret dadurch ausleben, dass wir in der Welt handeln,“ meinte Douwe Visser, der theologische Referent der Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen (WGRK).

Gastgeberin dieses ersten Treffens, das vom 26. bis zum 31. Oktober 2015 in Kochi, Indien (Bundesstaat Kerala) stattgefunden hat, war die Church of South India (CSI), eine Mitgliedskirche der WGRK, in der sich Kirchen anglikanischer, methodistischer, kongregationalistischer, presbyterianischer und reformierter Prä-



gung zusammengeschlossen haben. Die Dialoggruppe wurde von Bischof Thomas K. Oommen (Stellvertretender Moderator der CSI) und D. R. Sadananda (Generalsekretär der CSI) begrüßt. Die Kirche von Südindien war selber durch einen Delegierten und zwei wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter an den Gesprächen beteiligt. Deren Mitwirkung wurde als so positiv gewertet, dass beschlossen wurde, auch bei künftigen Treffen Vertreter der jeweiligen gastgebenden Kirche an den Gesprächen zu beteiligen.

„Der Höhepunkt dieser Woche bestand darin, dass wir in Indien waren“, meinte Elizabeth Welch, Pfarrerin der Clapton Park United Reformed Church aus Hackney, London. „Dadurch hatten wir die Gelegenheit, Menschen aus der Kirche von Südindien anzuhören, einer Kirche, in der Reformierte und Anglikaner bereits vereint sind. Wir hatten auch die Chance von den Herausforderungen zu hören, mit denen Christen in Indien konfrontiert sind und die wunderbare Gastfreundschaft unserer indischen Gastgeber zu erfahren.“

Als weiteren Höhepunkt bezeichnete Fundiswa Kobo von der Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa die gemeinsamen Gottesdienste und die Gemeinschaft am Tisch des Herrn.

Die Woche hatte mit einem Abendmahlsgottesdienst nach der Liturgie der United Reformed Church begon-

nen, bei dem der anglikanische Delegationsleiter gepredigt hatte. Zum Abschluss fand ein Abendmahlsgottesdienst nach der anglikanischen Liturgie der Scottish Episcopal Church statt, bei der der reformierte Delegationsleiter die Predigt hielt. Täglich gab es jeweils eine Morgen- und eine Abendandacht.

Im Ergebnis wurden drei Unterthemen für den Dialog im kommenden Jahr benannt:

- Die Zeichen von Gemeinschaft
- Gemeinschaft, Einheit und Verschiedenheit
- Gemeinschaft, Kirchenstruktur und Autorität

Mitglieder der anglikanischen Delegation: David Chillingworth, Scottish Episcopal Church; Clint Le Bruyns, Anglican Church of Southern Africa; Renta Nishihara, Nippon Sei Ko Kai; Amy E. Richter, the Episcopal Church; Kumara Illangasinghe (Berater), Church of Ceylon; Mitarbeiter: John Gibaut (Geschäftsführer) und Neil Vigers.

Mitglieder der WGRK-Delegation: Elizabeth Welch, United Reformed Church; Iain Torrance, Church of Scotland; Royce M. Victor, Church of South India; Fundiswa Amanda Kobo (Assistentin), Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa; Helené Van Tonder, Dutch Reformed Church; Mitarbeiter: Douwe Visser (Geschäftsführer). CSI Beobachter: Allan Samuel Palanna and Sharath Sowseelya.

La première consultation Accra+10 met l'accent sur la justice de genre

La première d'une série de consultations bi-régionales centrées sur la Confession d'Accra a eu lieu au Ghana en novembre 2015. Les participants venant de la Communion d'Églises Réformées d'Afrique (ACRC) et du Conseil d'Asie du Nord-Est (NEAAC) se sont réunis sous le thème « Lire les Signes du Temps sous la perspective du Genre ».

L'intention générale de cette consultation était l'étude, sous les angles de l'égalité des sexes et de différents contextes, des défis auxquels font face nos églises dans une situation d'ensemble caractérisée par la violence, l'injustice et la déchéance tant des êtres humains que de la nature.

« Pour moi ce sujet est important, parce qu'il s'attaque à un problème tenace et à une attitude profondément



établie qui affecte l'humanité depuis très longtemps, » dit Lydia Adajawah, la présidente de l'ACRC.

« Hommes et femmes sont dotés par Dieu de différentes potentialités et talents. Mais pour bien trop de temps les femmes ont été reléguées au second rang et n'ont donc pas pu se servir pleinement de leurs dons. Le monde est donc privé de la moitié de ses ressources humaines au désavantage de nous tous. » ajoute Adajawah.

« Il est important que l'église et la CMER se préoccupent de la justice de genre car ainsi les femmes qui peuvent contribuer une grande richesse d'idées à tous les niveaux de décision dans l'église, dans la communauté et dans le monde seraient incluses, » explique Salome Twum, membre du Comité Exécutif de la CMER. « Les femmes sont créées à l'image de Dieu et sont tout à fait en mesure d'influencer les prises de décisions à tous les niveaux. »

« Cela aide mon église à rompre le silence et à mettre en train le débat pour résoudre les problèmes d'inégalité des sexes dans notre système, » dit Gifty N.Y. Ahadzi de l'Église Presbytérienne du Ghana.

La réflexion a été accompagnée d'études bibliques quotidiennes dirigées par Fundiswa Kobo d'Afrique du Sud, de présentations du point de vue des régions, de réflexions en petits groupes, de sessions plénières ainsi que d'une conférence présentée par Setri Nyomi, l'ancien secrétaire général de la CMER. Dans son discours le pasteur Nyomi

souligna l'engagement historique de la CMER en faveur de la justice de genre et de l'amélioration du statut des femmes dans la direction des églises.

La visite d'Elmina Castle, un lieu de passage pour la traite des esclaves, a aidé les participants à mieux comprendre la question de justice à travers la douloureuse histoire de l'esclavagisme au Ghana. Le fait, qu'une chapelle réformée ait été construite au-dessus du donjon où étaient emprisonnées les femmes forcées à l'esclavage et brutalement maltraitées, fut particulièrement remarqué.

Le processus de réflexion fut aidé par la rencontre de deux groupes venant de régions différentes avec leurs propres perspectives, leurs défis contextuels et leurs expériences.

« Il est important de réunir les églises membres de différentes régions car, plus ils ont l'occasion de se rencontrer, plus nous comprenons que nous avons plus en commun que de différences et ceci nous aide à combattre les racines de l'injustice, » déclare Rosemary Nachilembe de l'Église Unie de Zambie. « En d'autres termes, les effets du péché sont ressentis dans les différentes régions. Ainsi nos rencontres nous offrent un lieu où les églises membres peuvent, par leurs différents récits, s'encourager mutuellement et se dire qu'il y existe encore un espoir. »

A l'issue de la consultation, les délégués se sont engagés à se pencher sur diverses questions et d'attirer l'attention de toutes les églises membres à ces mêmes problèmes. Il s'agit entre autres de donner une voix à tous dans la direction des églises, de développer un modèle d'études bibliques qui encourage la participation de tous et d'encourager une représentation équitable et juste de tout le monde à tous les niveaux des églises.

« La résolution des participants d'exiger de leurs églises la justice de genre ainsi qu'une représentation équilibrée lors de l'assemblée Générale en 2017 est un résultat très significatif, » déclare Dora Arce-Valentin, la responsable de la CMER pour la Justice et le Partenariat.

« Mon rêve et mon espoir en ce qui concerne la justice de genre sont les suivants: Comme notre Seigneur a appelé hommes et femmes à le suivre dans sa mission, je voudrais voir qu'un jour la liberté de pouvoir servir au sein de l'église devienne une réalité partout dans le monde, » explique Mai-aiki Kadade de l'Église Évangélique de la République du Niger.

Les participants étaient originaires de la République Démocratique du Congo, du Ghana, du Kenya, de l'île Maurice, du Niger, du Nigeria, du Rwanda, d'Afrique du Sud, de Corée du Sud, du Togo, d'Uganda et de Zambie.

La prochaine consultation bi-régionale Accra+10 est prévue pour Janvier 2016 à Cuba avec la participation de l'Alliance des Églises Presbytériennes et Réformées d'Amérique Latine (AIPRAL) et du Conseil de la Région des Caraïbes et d'Amérique du Nord (CANAAC).



Contract for 2017 General Council signed

The contract for the venue of the 2017 General Council was officially signed by Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, and Markus Geisenberger, the Leipzig conference centre's CEO, in the presence of the mayor of the city of Leipzig, Burkhard Jung, and representatives of the regional church of Saxony and local congregations during a ceremony at the Reformed Church of Leipzig.

Ferguson noted how much enthusiasm the German member churches had when inviting the WCRC to hold its meeting in Germany and thanked the local congregation for its energetic support.

The theme of the gathering taking place in the summer of 2017 is **“Living God, renew and transform us.”** The council will deal with issues of justice, church unity and world renewal. More than a thousand delegates, observers, members of staff and invited guests from 108 countries will be meeting in Leipzig for the council, which runs 27 June to 7 July. The 2017 General Council will be the largest event organized in Germany by an international church organization during the Reformation Jubilee, celebrating 500 years since the start of the Martin Luther-sparked Reformation.

The mayor described the city of Leipzig as a secularized city with only 15% of the population registered as members of a Christian church. Nevertheless the people were looking forward to the council. “With its rich tradition as a city of international fairs and exhibitions the people of Leipzig like to welcome the world as their guest. And even though they may not belong to a church, they have confidence in the church and believe that it can make a difference,” Jung said.

Martin Henker, Lutheran dean of the church district of Leipzig, affirmed that the city was particularly appropriate for holding this since the local Reformed church had played an important part prior to the peaceful revolution of 1989. When the Monday Prayers in the St. Nikolai Church were overcrowded the Reformed Church was the first church to open its doors for further peace vigils. Its minister also gave a camera crew access to the church tower from which it was able to film the largest demonstration on 7 October 1989. It was this recording shown on West German television that allowed the world to witness the revolutionary events of Leipzig.

Sabine Dressler, the German Reformed Alliance's secretary for ecumenical relations, explained with regard to the 2017 General Council's theme that being Reformed meant to recognize the signs of the time and to confess and live the Christian faith in present day situations. The history of Reformed churches was shaped by the experience of migration and the search for places of refuge. In the face of the present day situation of refugees around the world the German Reformed Alliance expects the council to focus on the themes of migration and refugees in accordance with the biblical commandment to love one's neighbour and the stranger, in order to empower local churches in their ministry.

Elke Bucksch, minister of the Reformed Church of Leipzig, highlighted the fact that her church had been founded by Reformed refugees. Considering this history the congregation likes to offer hospitality and looks forward to the many guests who will be attending the 2017 General Council. A group of volunteers has already started to prepare for the assembly in many practical ways.

LIVING GOD RENEW AND TRANSFORM US

26th General Council – 27 June to 7 July 2017
Leipzig, Germany





World Communion
of Reformed Churches

Solidarity visit strengthens ties

With its origins in Europe, the history and traditions of the Reformation are strong across much of the continent. And yet there are member churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) that are distinct minorities in their own countries.

WCRC Europe, one of the regional councils of the WCRC, has made a point of making “solidarity visits” to these smaller churches. Thus their most recent steering committee meeting was held in Zagreb, where they met with church leaders from both Croatia and Slovenia.

Both the Reformed Christian Church in Croatia (RCCC) and the Reformed Christian Church in Slovenia (RCCS) have close connections to the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH). The RCCS was only separated from its “mother church” by shifting political borders following the First World War. The RCCC, on the other hand, grew from Protestant congregations that have been present in Croatia since the Luther-sparked Reformation, nearly 500 years ago, gradually developing its Reformed identity.



message,” says Branimir Bučanović, RCCC synod secretary and pastor of several congregations.

Much attention has been focused on rebuilding churches, 70% of which were destroyed in the 1991 war following the collapse of Yugoslavia. Funds for rebuilding have come from a variety of sources, mainly from the Croatian government but with some also coming from the Hungarian government, the Reformed Church in Hungary and from sources in the USA and Germany.

“As the buildings are restored, people are recovering,” says Bučanović, “although there is still bitterness and anger.” Hardly any Croat family did not lose at least one member of their family during the communist era and minorities suffered greatly during the war. People are encouraged by their pastors to repent and forgive.

“The memory of the war is receding and people are consciously and deliberately living in the present rather than the past. The level of tolerance and forgiveness is surprisingly high,” says Bučanović.

The church in Slovenia has faced many of the same challenges, although it was founded less than a century ago and numbers about 150 members at four congregations.

The war in 1991 meant that the contact with the Reformed Christian Church in Yugoslavia was broken, but relationships were re-established with the church in Hungary, reflecting the fact that when one border closed, another opened.

The relationship with the Reformed Church in Hungary has recently provided the RCCS with its first full-time pastorate in over 60 years. Tamás Bódis and Emőke Rozgonyi were dispatched from the RCH to serve in a short-term capacity but elected to stay.

“There was a sense that the church was dying, but the possibility of having full time pastors has given new hope,” says Géza Kócán, lay president of the RCCS.

Work has been undertaken to renovate the main church of the RCCS. As in Croatia, repairing a building has come along with the reconstruction of a community. The legacies of wars, shifting borders and forced resettlements continue. Many families have been divided by the changing borders and much work is being done to rebuild connections.

Leaders from both the RCCS and the RCCC expressed their thanks for the connections to and support from the WCRC as demonstrated by the steering committee’s visit. The steering committee also worshiped with two RCCC congregations while there.

The WCRC Europe steering committee consists of Jan-Gerd Heetderks, president; Balázs Ódor and Martina Wasserloos, vice presidents; Sandy Horsburgh, secretary, Kerstin Koch, treasurer; and Bas Plaisier, WCRC vice president from Europe.



In Croatia, a first wave of persecution came with the counter-Reformation in the early 1600s when the Croatian parliament passed a law against Protestantism. Although freedom of religion was finally restored (nearly 200 years later), only “foreigners” were able to exercise this right as Croatia remained a firmly Roman Catholic nation. Thus, churches were focused on serving the needs of Hungarians, Germans, Czechs and Slovaks.

A century ago, Protestants could count around 50,000 members in Croatia, but that number has been declining steadily over the decades. Today, the RCCC has 3500 members in 23 congregations, not all of which are fully functioning.

“The church is looking for ways to be relevant to today’s society and how to reach people with the gospel

에큐메니칼 포럼으로 교회가 동북아시아 평화에 헌신하다

세계개혁신교회 커뮤니티(WCRC)의 회원 교단인 대한예수교 장로회 (통합)와 한국기독교 장로회 (기장)는 100주년 축하 행사에 앞서 공동으로 동북아시아 평화에 관한 국제 에큐메니칼 포럼을 주최했다.

지난 9월 11일부터 13일 까지 서울에서 열린 이 포럼에 세계 20개국의 WCRC 회원 교단들과 에큐메니칼 단체들에서 파송된 120명 이상의 대표들과 지도자들이 참석했다. 제리 필라이(Jerry Pillay) WCRC 총재와 크리스 퍼거슨(Chris Ferguson) WCRC 총무도 이 포럼에 참석했다.

기장과 예장통합은 한반도의 정의, 치유, 화해, 및 평화적 통일을 위한 에큐메니칼 헌신을 활성화하고 강화하기 위하여 본 행사를 유치했다. 포럼 기간 동안 이 주제들이 잘 다루어졌고, "동북아시아의 국민들은 정의와 평화를 열망하고 있으며, 한국의 통일은 이 과정에 불가결한 조치이다" 라는 메시지로 포럼이 마감되었다.

이 메시지는 평화와 화해를 위한 기장과 예장통합의 수고를 치하하면서 그것이 항상 쉽지는 않았다는 사실을 주지시켰다: "예장통합과 기장이 이 공동 에큐메니칼 포럼을 개최한 것은 희망의 신호입니다... 우리는 한국뿐만 아니라 지구촌 기독교 공동체 안에서도 교단 간의 값진 일치가 희생적인 제자도에 꼭 필요하다는 점을 기억해야 합니다."

메시지는 이렇게 이어졌다: "한반도의 분단과 그로 말미암은 인류의 손실은 생명의 충만함을 원하시는 하나님의 뜻을 거스르는 것입니다. 그것은 하나님과 인류에 대한



죄악입니다. 교회는 스스로를 변화시키며 치유와 화해에 동참하라는 소명을 받았습니다. 그러나, 냉전의 증오와 적대감을, 기독교인들 간의 문제까지 포함하여, 해소하지 않고선, 교회는 평화와 정의에 기여할 수 없습니다."

"우리는 통일이 치유와 양육과 완전함의 상급이 아니라 과정이라는 것을 깨닫고 흔들림 없이 신실하게 인내하면서 이 절박한 순간에 동참합니다."

메시지의 결론부에서 한반도와 남북한 국민들과 그 교회들의 평화, 화해, 통일을 초점을 맞춘 10가지 헌신이 언급되었다.

포럼은 예장통합과 기장과 한국교회협의회가 추가적인 평화 모임을 가시도록 요청하고 "지구촌의 협력 교단들이 동북아에 대한 실천과 지지를 포함한 에큐메니칼 안전들을 우선적으로 다뤄주도록" 촉구하고 마감되었다.

PCT uses 150th anniversary to move ahead

Another member church in Asia noted a significant anniversary this year: The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan used its anniversary to reflect and remember its 150 years of existence and also set a course for its future.

Three major thanksgiving services held throughout the year allowed members from all parts of Taiwan to celebrate. These were held in the south, the north and then in Tainan, the birthplace of the church.

Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, joined other ecumenical guests for the Tainan celebration, which also included a German-inspired "kirchentag" (church days) event. In his message at the service Ferguson acclaimed the work of the Holy Spirit in the PCT's 150 years: "You have commemorated the presence of the



Spirit in the churches' struggles and suffering in standing with the people in a courageous ministry of defense of human rights. You have recalled the Spirit leading you to set at liberty the oppressed as you joined the struggle for an independent Taiwan. You have stood by the people in hope and love."

Many other activities also marked the year. These included an exhibition at the National Museum of Taiwan History showing the strong relationship between Christian ministry and the development of modern society, forums to help congregations rethink and envision their future, cycling around the island and beach cleaning events to demonstrate God's commitment to creation and a youth forum featuring Joshua Wong, a leading figure of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement.

News from around the communion



Dozens of United and Uniting denominations are members of the WCRC, which also includes churches from the Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed and Waldensian traditions. Over 17 United and Uniting churches gathered for their 9th consultation in India at the end of November. WCRC General Secretary Chris Ferguson, a member of the United Church of Canada, participated. “These churches considered how their experience on living in reconciled diversity can make a contribution to those churches confronting church dividing issues,” said Ferguson. “They also see a role in witnessing to the imperative of unity.”



Douwe Visser, the WCRC’s executive secretary for theology, mission and communion, coordinated and hosted a consultation on “Religions and State: A comparison between Christianity and Islam” at the John Knox Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, in October.



Work began on delving more deeply into the 2017 General Council theme—Living God, Renew and Transform Us—at a meeting held at the WCRC’s offices in Hannover, Germany, at the end of September. Theologians from six continents gathered to engage in the theme and begin work on developing resources for use in congregations of the Communion.

Keep up with news from around the Communion, including from our member churches, each Thursday on our blog:
wcrch.org/blog



A task group on women's ordination met at the WCRC offices in mid-October. Gathered from five continents, they discussed ways in which to address the issue leading up to the 2017 General Council, including the creation of materials to assist churches.



Werner Joecker, assistant to the Reformed Partnership Fund (RPF), and Phil Tanis, executive secretary for communications, attended the kick-off for Brot für die Welt's 57th annual Advent appeal. Brot für die Welt is a close partner and helps fund the RPF. The campaign's theme, "Satt is nicht genug!" (Enough is not enough!), points to the need to have a diversity of seeds and crops to ensure the quality of food to combat malnutrition. Speaking about the importance of seed diversity was Dr. Vandana Shiva, founder of Navdanya, a network of seed keepers and organic producers spread across 18 states in India, and partner of Brot für die Welt.



Martin Junge, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and Kaisamari Hintikka, assistant general secretary for ecumenical relations and the director for the LWF's Department for Theology and Public Witness, came to the WCRC offices in September. They met with Chris Ferguson and Douwe Visser to discuss deepening relationships between the two organizations.



Members of the WCRC have joined in an ecumenical and interfaith effort to encourage governments to agree to collectively care for all creation. Just prior to the start of the COP21 climate summit in Paris, France, they gathered for an interfaith celebration in the Basilica of Saint Denis.

Working for a just world economy

The Council for World Mission (CWM) held their latest colloquium on the New International Economic and Financial Architecture (NIFEA) initiative in mid-October in Singapore. The NIFEA initiative is a joint effort between CWM, the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and the WCRC.

In a Bible study reflecting on Hebrews 11:1-3, Dr. Aruna Gndason stressed that faith in action is essential in challenging life negating values. "Our faith in Jesus should inspire us to challenge values that discriminate and alienate because equality is God's creation and its resources belong to all and not for the few."

Another component in the NIFEA project is the first ecumenical school on Governance, Economics and Management (GEM) for an Economy of Life. The GEM school will meet in Hong Kong in August/September 2016. The GEM school will gather a small group of current and future leaders representing the churches in order to strengthen the voice of the churches with regards to global economics.

"The GEM school is a great project as part of the whole programme for working on a new financial architecture," said Douwe Visser, the GEM school coordinator for the WCRC.



Chris Ferguson
General Secretary

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World
Communion
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Churches

Called to
Communion,
Committed to
Justice

*“And Mary said my soul magnifies the Lords, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...
For the Mighty One has done great things for me...
His mercy is for generation to generation...
God has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts...
God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly...
God has filled the hungry with good things...
God has remembered Israel...according to his promises to Abraham and his descendants forever...”*
—Luke 1:46-56 (High notes from Mary’s Song)

Every day we are reminded in real and powerful ways what a wide and vast family the WCRC is. The year that we are leaving behind has been fraught with struggles and challenges around the world. Our churches are fully immersed in the painful realities of this moment in world history, walking with those seeking hope, the spiritually distressed and the perplexed and lost—as well as the socially afflicted. To be part of our Communion means that wherever we are we are bound up in the whole story of what is happening in our world. We can’t escape and do not want to escape the enormity of the brokenness of our world.

Faced with a similar overwhelming enormity in Roman-occupied Palestine and confronted with an unexpected pregnancy and certain social disgrace, Mary, a young peasant girl, seeks the solidarity of her cousin and somehow sees that God is in fact at work. And instead of a sober response...Mary sings! She sees how God is made great in the hope that is brought by the child she carries. She sees in the long sweep of history that God has not abandoned humanity—and the great things that God has done, is doing and will do specifically to address the enormity of the troubles. Mary, in the midst of what should be paralysing fear and unbridled despair, reaches out to others and gives voice to hope.

This hope is grounded in the certainty of God’s love and presence. In the face of what should have been a desperate situation, Mary saw the certainty and joy in knowing she was part of the story where God breaks through and turns the world upside down. The Good News of Christmas starts, of course, before the birth. It starts with God’s moving from below, moving in and among those whose life is most threatened and suffering most immense. The Spirit does not simply breathe hope and overcome fear. God works to change systems and structures of sin and death so that the lowly are lifted up.

Mary sings not to ignore reality but precisely because she has grasped that God is working in and through her to turn things upside down. And she is gripped with thanksgiving, joy and purpose—all the while knowing that the road is no less long and hard.

I started to write this reflection while stranded in Chennai, India, by the worst flooding in 100 years. The loss of life and massive displacement is heartrending. It is even worse as it is tied to climate change, corruption and social injustices that make the poor even more vulnerable. The roar of the pain around the world was amplified by seeing up close the suffering in Chennai.

But even at the same time the Church of South India was responding with aid—and being joined by sister churches from our Communion. God’s people have a role not only as beneficiaries of God’s mercy but to be engaged in the lifting up, in the overturning work of the Saviour God. Mary’s song and the hope that it nurtures—to open us to be part of what God is doing in the face of the enormity—is being sung by those who give thanks to God for the gift of life.

Mary’s song has already set the music. We now need to continue to write the words as we seek to be a true Communion upholding each other in unity, renewing our churches for the transformation of the world. The challenges are immense as many forces are at work to fragment and divide us. Drawing together and strengthening each other in service draws another powerful lesson from Mary who sought the support of Elizabeth.

So this Christmas, as we are faced with the enormity of the threats to life and creation itself, remember that a song breaks in, lifts us up and compels us forward with the Spirit of the God of Life who keeps the promise to save and redeem us through Jesus Christ.