



Consultation looks to empower regions

A Regional Empowerment Consultation held in Hannover, Germany, in February focused on ways in which the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) can strengthen its work through better engagement on a regional level.

The consultation, which brought together WCRC officers, regional leaders and staff over three days, agreed on ways to improve work in the following areas:

- Communication
- Relationships of member churches within regions
- Relationships with other ecumenical bodies
- Reformed identity within broader contexts
- Initiating and facilitating programs
- Role of officers in regions

Several ideas were also outlined which will be developed into proposals for this year's General Council to consider, including how new Regional Councils should be delineated, organized and recognized—an issue which the WCRC Executive Committee also discussed at its meeting in May 2016.

Looking broadly at the existence of regions in the organization the consultation reviewed the ways in which geographic regions have been organized and recognized as formal Regional Councils. Participants noted that several organized regions are not yet recognized. There are also several geographic areas yet awaiting organization.



Regional leaders from around the world gather in Hannover.

Currently, there are five organized and recognized Regional Councils:

- Africa Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC)
- Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC)
- Latin America Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (AIPRAL)
- Northeast Asia Area Council (NEAAC)
- WCRC Europe

Two regions that are organized but not yet recognized:

- Indonesia
- South Asia

Two regions that are yet to get organized formally:

- Middle East
- Pacific

Other topics discussed during the consultation included power relationships within regions, situating all member churches into a region

and ensuring that all regions have representation on the Executive Committee.

Participants at the consultation, held from 8-10 February 2017, were:

- Officers: Jerry Pillay, Helis Baraza, Yvette Bloomfield, Yueh-Wen Lu, Bas Plaisier, Johann Weusmann, Chris Ferguson
- Regional leaders: Lydia Adajawah (ACRC), Aginaldo Gomes (AIPRAL), Jan-Gerd Heetderks (WCRC Europe), Najla Kassab (Middle East), Allen Nafuki (Pacific), Zakaria Ngelow (Indonesia), Rathnakara Sadananda (South Asia), Eric So (NEAAC), Lisa Vander Wal (CANAAC)
- Staff: Dora Arce-Valentin, Phil Tanis, Grenna Kaiya, Miguel Rosa ●

Interns excited about General Council

Each year the staff of the World Communion of Reformed Churches welcomes one or two new young adults as interns to its offices in Hannover, Germany. Interns have come from Indonesia and South Africa, South Korea and Taiwan, the United States and elsewhere. With a commitment to ecumenism, they seek connections, experiences and opportunities.

This year's interns are no different in that regard, and they have the special opportunity to assist on this summer's General Council, to be held in Leipzig, Germany.

"In the upcoming year I am excited about being on the team that is directly involved in the preparation of the WCRC's General Council," says Grenna Kaiya.

Miguel Rosa is also looking forward to the Council: "I think being part of the General Council team and being able to attend the General Council, especially in this 500th year since the Reformation, is what I'm most excited about."

Grenna is from Malawi but has lived most recently in Oslo, Norway, where she was doing post graduate studies in Diakonia and Christian Social Practice and in International Relations. Miguel is a Puerto Rican university student, studying engineering, and has been a youth leader in his church on the island.

During an intern's year with the WCRC, they participate fully in the life of the organization, coming away with a richer understanding of the greater church, its role in the world today—and friendships that span the globe.

"The thing that interests me the most about the ecumenical movement is that humanity has always been very capable of noticing the things that divides us and the things that makes us different. The ecumenical movement is the place where we start to look for the things we have in



Miguel Rosa and Grenna Kaiya

common, and we start working together as a family," says Miguel.

"I am interested in the ecumenical movement because of its focus on Christian unity and dialogue among peoples and religions of the world," says Grenna, adding that she has a special interest in peace efforts and justice work. Post-internship she plans to explore opportunities to join "peace and justice efforts around the world."

Miguel plans on first finishing his degree. And then? "After that I would like to continue and do my Masters degree either in theatre or go to seminary to study theology and the ecumenical movement from the perspective of the youth in different contexts," he says.

But their next steps are many months—and a General Council—away, and right now they're immersed in the growing number of details to bring together hundreds of people around the world to discern God's will through Scripture to set the WCRC's direction for the next seven years.

Grenna's responsibilities for the Council are wide-ranging and include contacting member churches that have not yet nomi-

nated their delegates, helping the finance office in filing and assisting the communication office.

Miguel has joined the registration team and is "talking to every member church and people that wish to register for the Council. For the member churches I have to make sure they meet our constitutional parameters and be in constant communication with all of them to make sure they received their documents and have been moved to the pertinent teams for visa, travel and accommodation."

The WCRC's internship programme is funded primarily by a grant from the Evangelische Missionswerk with additional funds contributed by the Council for World Mission, the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. Individual donations are also welcome! ●

دعوة متجددة للسلام الفوري في سوريا

"وَفِيمَا هُوَ يَقْتَرِبُ نَظَرَ إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ وَبَكَى عَلَيْهَا قَائِلًا: «إِنَّكَ لَوْ عَلِمْتَ أَنْتِ أَيْضًا، حَتَّى فِي يَوْمِكَ هَذَا، مَا هُوَ لِسَلَامِكَ!» (لوقا 19: 41-42)

مع اقترابنا من أسبوع الآلام، إننا نشعر بالخوف مرة أخرى بسبب العنف الذي يرتكب ضد الشعب السوري. رغم أنها السنة السابعة للحرب، إلا أن الفظائع ودورة العنف التي تستنزف سوريا لا تظهر بعد أي علامات على التراجع. إن الرد على العنف بالعنف لن يجلب السلام.

لقد دعت اللجنة التنفيذية لشركة الكنائس المصلحة في العالم في اجتماعها عام 2015 في لبنان "إلى وقف العنف في سوريا فوراً، والصلاة من أجل أن ينتشر السلام مثل الموج من هناك إلى جميع أنحاء المنطقة". وإننا نعيد تأكيد هذه الدعوة بقوة.

يجب أن يتوقف العنف من قبل جميع الأطراف. كما يجب أن يتوقف تدفق الأسلحة إلى المنطقة. ويجب أن يتوقف التصعيد العسكري.

وندعو الولايات المتحدة وجميع الأطراف الدولية الفاعلة الأخرى إلى الكف عن القيام بأعمال عسكرية أحادية الجانب، واحترام القانون الدولي والاستفادة من الآليات الدولية القائمة التي يمكنها بل ينبغي لها أن تعالج الجرائم ضد الإنسانية والاعتداءات على حياة الإنسان وكرامته.

ويجب على المجتمع الدولي أن يعمل معاً باستخدام النظم والسلطات المتاحة له للعمل على وجه الاستعجال على إحلال السلام والعدالة في سوريا. ومن ثم، فإننا ننضم إلى مجلس الكنائس العالمي في دعوته مجلس الأمن التابع للأمم المتحدة لاستخدام سلطته للتحقيق في جميع الجرائم المرتكبة ضد الإنسانية التي ترتكب في سوريا، وإنشاء آليات للمساءلة من شأنها أن تجلب جميع المسؤولين إلى المحاكمة.

فالسلام مع العدالة في سياق القانون الدولي هو السبيل الوحيد للسير إلى الأمام في حماية شعب سوريا من دائرة العنف المستمرة المحاصرين فيها.

يرجى الانضمام إلينا في الدعوة والصلاة من أجل السلام ليحل على سوريا. كما نرجو أن نصلي للذين فقدوا أحبائهم، وأولئك الذين نزحوا، ولأولئك الذين لا يزالون يعانون، ولأولئك الذين يستجيبون بالمساعدة، ولأولئك الذين يعملون من أجل السلام، ولجميع شعب سوريا.

السلام أجل من ت عمل التي الأمور اليوم، هذا في ندرك دعونا

Compte rendu du dialogue international entre la Communion mondiale d'églises réformées (CMER) et les Pentecôtistes classiques.

Le dialogue porte sur le ministère dans le monde

Durant la troisième session du dialogue en cours entre Pentecôtistes et Réformés, une délégation de la Communauté mondiale d'églises réformées (CMER) et des représentants de différentes églises pentecôtistes classiques se sont réunis sous le thème « Servir les besoins du monde : Mission et Pneumatologie ».

Des exposés furent présentés par le professeur Wonsuk Ma (Pentecotiste) et la théologienne Dr. Nadia Marais (Réformée).

Nadia Marais fonde son exposé sur la formule du Symbole de Nicée selon laquelle l'Esprit Saint est « Seigneur, qui donne la vie ». En lien avec ceci, elle souligne les influences pneumatologiques au sein de la tradition réformée et leurs implications pour la mission:

- Premièrement ce n'est pas l'Esprit seul mais l'Esprit envoyé par le Père et le Fils qui agit en mission.
- Deuxièmement la personne et l'œuvre de l'Esprit est en relation avec la personne et l'œuvre du Fils, « dont la vie, le ministère et la mort offrent le fondement pour l'action de l'Esprit par rapport au monde. »
- Troisièmement l'Esprit, don de Dieu qui se donne lui-même, est un don accordé aux disciples et à l'église, et il donne aussi une variété de dons à la communauté et au sein de la communauté, dont le don de la vie est le plus important.

Dans sa conclusion ouverte, Nadia Marais plaide en faveur d'un langage qui parlerait de don et de l'acte de donner pour compléter le langage très répandu qui parle d'envoyer et d'être envoyé lorsqu'il s'agit de l'œuvre missionnaire de l'église.

L'exposé du professeur Ma porte le titre: « Le Saint Esprit dans la Mission pentecôtiste: Une étude de



la formation d'une conscience et d'une pratique missionnaires »

La formation missionnaire, selon lui, commence au niveau personnel car elle est liée étroitement à la formation spirituelle. La conversion en tant que rencontre avec Dieu est la clé. Cette expérience se traduit en une vie engagée dans la mission. Être appelé par Dieu et être mandaté pour un ministère vont souvent ensemble. Beaucoup de pentecôtistes considèrent un baptême par le Saint Esprit qui donne courage et le fait de bénéficier de dons ordinaires et extraordinaires comme essentiels pour une formation missionnaire.

Le professeur Ma s'est ensuite concentré sur le rôle du Saint esprit dans la pratique missionnaire. La manifestation de « signes et miracles » au cours d'une évangélisation ou de l'établissement d'une nouvelle communauté chrétienne est considérée comme une confirmation du message biblique de la bonne nouvelle en Jésus Christ.

Pour conclure, Wonsuk Ma souligne que c'est le Dieu souverain qui est toujours à l'origine de telles manifestations. Lorsqu'elles se produisent, elles doivent être comprises comme signes de la grâce de Dieu.

Lors des débats à la suite de ces exposés, les ressemblances et les différences entre les deux approches

furent analysées et précisées, les questions se préoccupant de la nature de l'œuvre du Saint Esprit, de sa relation avec l'œuvre salvatrice de Jésus Christ et de la responsabilisation des croyants dans leur ministère auprès d'un monde en difficulté. Cette discussion enrichissante et exigeante aida les deux groupes à mieux apprécier mutuellement les points de vue sur l'action du Saint Esprit dans la mission.

La rencontre eut lieu à l'Université Biblique Latino-Américaine à San José, Costa Rica, du 2 au 6 décembre 2016, où les délégués furent accueillis par Elisabeth Cook, la présidente de l'Université. Une rencontre avec la direction de l'Eglise évangélique presbytérienne du Costa Rica, membre de la CMER, a permis aux participants de s'informer au sujet de la vie de l'église réformée dans ce pays et d'apprendre, comment le pentecôtisme influence la spiritualité de nombreuses églises.

Dimanche, le 4 décembre, les participants purent se joindre au culte dirigé par Ledys Ruiz et Xinia Porras à l'église presbytérienne de New Guácima. Le dimanche soir les participants ont pris part au culte à l'International Pentecostal Holiness Church of the Word à Santa Barbara, Heredia, où Ana Felicia Ulloa est la pasteure. Les deux communau-

tés reçurent les délégués chaleureusement et généreusement.

Les discussions étaient accompagnées chaque jour d'un temps de prière le soir et le matin qui faisait intégralement partie du dialogue avec des prières, chants, lecture de la bible et méditation.

Le groupe pentecôtiste était composé des personnes suivantes:

- M. Robeck (Assemblies of God, USA),
- David Daniels (Church of God in Christ, USA),
- Jacqueline Grey (Australian Christian Churches),
- Harold D. Hunter (International Pentecostal Holiness Church, USA),
- Wonsuk Ma (Assemblies of God, Corée),

- Jean-Daniel Plüss (Mission Pentecotiste Suisse),
- Olga Zaprometova (Eglise de Dieu, Russie).

Le groupe réformé était composé des personnes suivantes :

- Karla Koll, (Presbyterian Church (USA), Costa Rica),
- Carmelo Alvarez (Disciples du Christ, Puerto Rico, USA),
- Dario Barolin (Eglise Vaudoise, Argentine),
- Nadia Marais (Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa),
- Setri Nyomi (Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana),
- Bas Plaisier (Eglise Protestante aux Pays Bas)
- Gabriella Rácsok (Eglise Réformée de Hongrie).

La prochaine session du dialogue entre Réformés et Pentecôtistes aura lieu du 30 novembre au 6 décembre à Sydney, Australie et aura pour sujet la relation entre la mission et l'église. ●

WCRC seeks new executives for communion and justice

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has begun an intensive search to find the next executive secretaries for Justice & Witness and Communion & Theology.

“Communion, theology and justice are key to the work of the WCRC,” says President Jerry Pillay. “We are set on building Christian unity both within the Communion and outside. We are big on ecumenical engagement, church dialogues and making a difference in the world as we work for justice, peace and reconciliation.”

Anna Case-Winters, of the Presbyterian Church (USA), is the chair of the search committee, which also includes Omega Bula (United Church of Zambia), the WCRC's six elected officers, and General Secretary Chris Ferguson.

“The work of communion and justice are vitally connected,” said Case-Winters. “The persons in these two positions will need commitments to both and the capacity to work col-

laboratively in a common mission that includes both.”

“The Accra Confession highlights the need for economic justice, gender justice and ecological justice. And we have to engage in our quest for justice from a biblical and theological perspective,” said Pillay. “Also we cannot have true unity and communion without addressing issues of injustice. It is thus clear that both positions are required to collaborate, engage and discern together on significant issues and challenges as we work towards the ‘fullness of life’ in Jesus Christ for everyone.”

Executive secretaries are appointed by the WCRC Executive Committee to serve a term of five years and are eligible for one renewal for an additional five-year term. It is anticipated that duties for both will begin on 1 January 2018. Both positions will be based in the WCRC office in Hannover, Germany.

“Our office is an international one and, in fact, most of our member churches are from the Global South,

so therefore our commitment is to reflect the diversity of this Communion,” said Ferguson. “As such, even as we welcome all qualified applicants, members from the Global South and women are especially encouraged to apply.”

Applications are due by 30 April 2017. Information on the application process, including full job descriptions, can be found at wcrc.ch/jobs.

Both positions are coming open as Douwe Visser, executive secretary for theology, mission and communion, is retiring as of 1 August, while Dora Arce Valentin, executive secretary for justice and partnership, completes her term on 31 December. ●

*Reformed Partnership Fund***Cuban farm becomes mission centre**

The “Jardin del Eden,” a farm outside of Matanzas, Cuba, was inspired by the biblical image of Genesis 2 that depicts humans as both part of creation and to whom God gave stewardship. And it is through God’s grace and a lot of human work over the last decade that the Demari Project, which includes the farm, is now an important centre for not only the churches but also the community.

“I said it’s God’s plan, it’s God’s mission and God will open doors for the Presbyterian Church to do it,” says Rev. Ofelia Ortega Suarez.

After running an organic vegetable garden at the Matanzas Theology Seminary, Ortega started exploring ways to expand the idea for the benefit of the community. She eventually connected with a local farmer, also a member of the Presbyterian Reformed Church there, who worked on land near the seminary.

“When I entered into the farm, I said oh my goodness! This is God’s mission, it was so beautiful,” recalls Ortega. “I said let us work together, to see what we can do, not only for yourselves, not only for your families but for the farms around us.”

A commitment to the environment, ecology and community service based on a biblical and theological understanding has guided the development of the facilities and programme for the Demari Project from the beginning.

Early in the project, it was realized that obtaining sufficient water was a challenge, and a well was needed to increase the productivity of the farm. However, the municipality could not grant them permission to drill because the land did not hold enough water. Something had to be done to reduce the erosion. Eventually, it was decided to plant trees to counter the water problem. Moringa and Morella trees were



Werner Joecker, assistant for the Reformed Partnership Fund, plants a new tree with Carlos Leon.

planted first. These plants were also used to feed the animals. In the course of time, the permission to dig a well was granted.

The organizers soon started workshops teaching people about how to take care of their land and the environment. The idea later grew to include a spiritual retreat centre at the farm for small churches and community groups. For a few years, the project was under the auspices of the Council of Churches of Cuba’s Christian Institute for Gender-related Studies. As a result, gender workshops were incorporated in the workshops for farmers.

Later on the Session of the Central Presbyterian Church of Matanzas accepted and supported the cause of Demari. In 2015 the project became the mission of the Central Presbyterian Church of Matanzas.

After more than a decade of work, and with the assistance of partner churches in North America and the WCRC’s Reformed Partnership Fund, the farm is an important

mission project of the church—and is also being used as a retreat and educational centre.

Objective of the Project

The project “Jardin del Eden” plans to enlarge the biblical-diaconal education of the church while providing a laboratory to develop a small agro-ecological and livestock production and an orchard for herbs, all under environmental sustainability.

The Mission of the project

- A retreat center and meeting place for church and community groups.
- A centre for practicing and demonstrating the responsible and sustainable use of the land and natural resources based on a biblical/theological understanding of ecology and stewardship.
- A centre for education and experimentation of ecological practices and family and community development based on spiritual values; and for assisting neigh-

Carlos Leon, administrator of the farm, with the next round of trees to be planted.

bours to develop cooperative patterns of food production and marketing and sharing of knowledge and resources.

Outcomes

Today the Demari Project is used both as a retreat and educational centre, as well as a working farm to provide an example for other farmers in the area.

- The land is better and continues to improve as different herbal and fruit trees are planted.
- The farm started producing biogas
- Milk is produced on the farm to give to families and children of the community



- There is enough water for the farmer to water their plants
- The Demari farm has become a reference in the community

- The project has received awards for their initiatives in taking care of the land
- The quality of life of the farmers has improved
- On-going workshops facilitated by experts in environment, helping farmers who initially did not have the expertise on how to increase their productivity
- On-going workshops on theology and gender leading to women support and empowerment. Again women's participation has increased.
- A fence is built to protect the land
- The nearby primary school benefits from the project as they learn through the project about environment and stewardship. ●



Applications to the Reformed Partnership Fund may be made at any time. We especially welcome requests from churches that have not previously applied. Grants are limited to €25,000; grants for emergency aid to €7,500. Further information can be found at wrc.ch/partnership-fund/ or by emailing partnership.fund@wrc.eu.

95 Tage zur Generalversammlung

Noch 95 Tage, dann beginnt in Leipzig die Generalversammlung der Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen unter dem Motto „Lebendiger Gott, erneuere und verwandle uns“. Die rund 800 Delegierten aus mehr als 200 Kirchen in aller Welt tagen im Kongresszentrum beim Messegelände am Stadtrand – doch auch in der Stadt soll das Treffen sichtbar werden – besonders in der Evangelisch Reformierten Kirche zu Leipzig. Dort bereitet sich die Gemeinde zum Beispiel auf den großen Willkommensabend vor, auf Gottesdienste, Andachten, ein Psalmenkonzert mit alter und neuer Musik, an dem die Kantorei der Gemeinde beteiligt ist, und ein Besucherprogramm, das den Gästen die Stadt Leipzig und ihre Geschichte näherbringen soll.

Hier einige Stimmen:

**Lisa Jacobs,
Theologiestudentin, beim
General Council als Steward
dabei:**

Schließlich ist es 2017. Das Lutherjahr. Nicht zu übersehen: Luther auf Zügen, Luther auf Babystraplern, Luther auf Socken... Und mitten in all diesem Luthertreiben, mitten in Sachsen, in der Mitte von Leipzig – die Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche und – die Generalversammlung der WGRK.

Steward war ich bereits – ob innerhalb der ERK oder des reformierten Bundes. Doch bereits bei der Anmeldung zum Helfen war alles größer, digitaler, weiter und formaler: Formulare auf Englisch, Delegierte von überall her, Vorbereitungen, die nicht erst seit gestern laufen! Und das alles mitten in Leipzig, wo das Evangelisch Reformierte in all seinen Facetten sein wird, bunt, offen, weit, laut, zusammen, füreinander. Die Vorfreude auf das, was für mich die Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche immer wieder ausmacht: Der Blick über den eigenen Tellerrand des Süp-



pchens, das zu Hause gekocht wird. Zu der reformierten Gelassenheit kommt langsam aber sicher eine Spannung, die Vorfreude und Neugierde mit sich bringt.

**Nicole Sieck, Gemeindeglied,
engagiert im
Besucherprogramm:**

Ich finde: dass die Generalversammlung nach Leipzig kommt, ist etwas ganz Besonderes. Das spürt man in der Gemeinde; und auch Außenstehende finden es spannend, wenn ich davon erzähle. Auch die Projektverantwortlichen beim Umweltprojekt „Lebendige Luppe“ waren von Anfang an begeistert und sind gespannt auf den Austausch mit den verschiedenen Nationen. Mir geht es ebenso.

Zunächst hatte ich nicht geplant, eine ganze Woche Urlaub dafür zu nehmen, aber letztlich möchte ich dann doch so viel wie möglich dabei sein – vor allem mit dem Geist, ohne ständiges Umschalten im Kopf, um

alles auch in Ruhe wirken lassen und aufnehmen zu können.

Ich finde es toll, dies alles als Gemeindeglied miterleben und auch mitgestalten zu können. Es ist aber auch eine große Herausforderung, zu deren Gelingen wir als Gemeinde vor Ort im Besonderen beitragen wollen. Man spürt die Lust und das Engagement, als Gemeinde den Delegierten und Besuchern eine schöne Zeit zu schenken. Vor allem auch unsere Stadt zu zeigen, sie mit ihrer Geschichte, ihrer Musik und ihrer Natur näher zu bringen.

**Christoph Nuck,
Theologiestudent,
Hausmeister, Küster:**

Ich erlebe die Vorbereitungen in einer spannenden Atmosphäre. Es wird schon lange im Voraus jeder Tag, jede Veranstaltung der Versammlung durchdacht und besprochen. Ich habe davon bisher wohl nur einen Bruchteil mitbekommen.

Auf der einen Seite freue ich mich auf die vielen Begegnungen und Themen, bin gespannt auf die verschiedenen Ausprägungen der Reformierten Kirchen in der ganzen Welt und deren Selbstverständnis. So sind die Reformierten in Deutschland eine Minderheit, aber weltweit gibt es viel mehr als zum Beispiel Lutheraner.

Ich frage mich: Warum nehmen viele Delegierte einen so weiten Weg auf sich? Was erwarten sie hier?

Auf der anderen Seite bin ich auf Situationen gespannt, die man nicht planen kann. Bei denen wir dann spontan Lösungen finden.

So hoffe ich, dass unsere Leipziger Gemeinde einen guten Eindruck hinterlässt und die Delegierten unsere Gastfreundschaft und Herzlichkeit in Erinnerung behalten. Außerdem wäre es schön, wenn wir in der Gemeinschaft ein wenig Gott begegnen könnten.

Uta-Beate Mutz, Mitarbeiterin für Diakonie und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit in der Kanzlei

Ich finde es sehr spannend, dass das so eine große Anzahl ist. Die Weltkonferenz wird auf der Messe stattfinden; das ist für mich ganz persönlich durch den theologischen Hintergrund etwas weit weg. Aber sie kommen auch in unsere Kirche; und ich denke: sich darauf vorzubereiten ist eine interessante, spannende Angelegenheit. Auf die Leute zuzugehen, wird nicht einfach werden, aber da werden wir uns mit befassen, damit wir gastfreundlich sind und die Gäste bei uns empfangen können, ihnen was zeigen, von unserer Geschichte erzählen – das fände ich spannend. Ich hoffe, dass sich das an dem Willkommensabend ergibt. Und wie sich die zwei Wochen dann gestalten, wie viel Arbeit da drin steckt, das wird sich zeigen. Aber der Abend, das wird schon spannend! ●

Council to act on proposed amendments to constitution

Among the items of business to be addressed at this summer's General Council, delegates will vote on proposed amendments to the World Communion of Reformed Churches Constitution and Bylaws.

The proposed amendments were approved by the WCRC Executive Committee at its meeting in May 2016 and sent to WCRC member churches for review in December.

For the proposed constitutional amendments to be adopted, two-thirds of the delegates at the General Council must vote in favour of them, while a simple majority of delegates is required to adopt the proposed amendments to the bylaws.

The current Constitution and Bylaws were adopted by the 2010 Uniting General Council as the WCRC's first governing document. At its meeting in 2015, the Executive Committee mandated a constitutional review committee to "clarify and propose appropriate revisions to the constitution of the WCRC paying particular attention to among others:

- the function of the officer's committee and the officer positions
- the role of regional VPs in their relationship to regional councils
- the function of the General Secretary in relation to other officers
- the size of delegations to the General Council"
- (Action 45, 2015 Executive Committee Minutes)

While addressing those items, the review committee also recommended a number of other changes that better focus the organization's work, streamline and remove inconsistencies from within the document, reflect the organization's move from Switzerland to Germany and make the English version the "definitive document for interpretation purposes."

The review committee created a document that explains the proposed amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws, through a side-by-side comparison of the current and proposed documents. This document can be found online at wrc.ch/gc2017/amendments-to-the-constitution-and-bylaws.

Also available on that page are the current constitution and the constitution with proposed amendments in six languages: English, French, German, Indonesian, Korean and Spanish. ●

Christian unity to be focus in Wittenberg

Five hundred years ago, Wittenberg was the site that sparked the Reformation, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to a church door. This year, Wittenberg is not only the centre of a year-long commemoration of that event but will also, for a day at least, focus on bringing together the Church.

On Wednesday, 5 July, the WCRC General Council will move from Leipzig to Wittenberg to host an ecumenical service of worship that will see the WCRC sign two documents.

One will be an association agreement to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). In 1999, after many years of committed dialogue, the JDDJ was signed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and states that the churches now share “a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.”



The Town Church in Wittenberg is the site for the ecumenical service.

In 2006, the World Methodist Council and its member churches affirmed their fundamental doctrinal agreement with the document and associated with the JDDJ, and in 2016 the Anglican Consultative Council “welcomed and affirmed the substance” of the JDDJ.

The WCRC is associating through its own statement that emphasizes the connection between justification and justice as a



Representatives from the WCRC and LWF meet to finalize the text for the “Wittenberg Witness.”



General Secretary Chris Ferguson discusses aspects of the service in Wittenberg with the worship team.

Reformed contribution to future ecumenical dialogue on the understanding of justification.

The second document to be signed at the service is becoming known as the “Wittenberg Witness” and is an agreement between the WCRC and the LWF. This common witness will confess the tragedy of a divided church, claim the fruit of the two organizations’ decades of committed dialogue and celebrate the new steps towards unity taken by their member churches around the world.

“We will commit ourselves to explore new forms of life together that will more fully express the com-

munion we already have in Christ,” says Anna Case-Winters, a WCRC member of the document drafting team. “And we commit ourselves to shared witness to resist the forces of injustice and exclusion in our church and in our world.”

The service will take place the morning of 5 July in the Stadtkirche Sankt Marien (Town Church of St. Mary’s), followed by a light lunch in the church square. General Council participants will then have the opportunity to explore the city and its many Reformation jubilee exhibits. ●

Welcome into your home: A call to prayer and action for refugees

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? —Isaiah 58:6-7

Last Friday evening, 27 January, United States President Donald Trump issued an executive order on immigration which indefinitely barred Syrian refugees from entering the U.S., suspended all refugee admissions for 120 days, limited the total number of refugees admitted to 50,000 for 2017 and blocked citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering for 90 days.

According to the Pew Research Center, in the last year the highest number of refugees entering the U.S. came from the Democratic Republic of Congo, accounting for 16,370. This was “followed by Syria (12,587), Burma (aka Myanmar, with 12,347), Iraq (9,880) and Somalia (9,020) [of 84,995 total]. Over the past decade, the largest numbers of refugees have come from Burma (159,692) and Iraq (135,643).”

Member churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches have responded to this executive order, which has since been stayed by a U.S. Federal judge.

J. Herbert Nelson II, stated clerk for the Presbyterian Church (USA), has said that the executive order functions to further harm the people “who are the very victims of terrorism, genocide, religious and gender-based persecution, and civil war.”

Russell Barr, moderator of the Church of Scotland, said, “History is littered with instances in which human distrust, xenophobia, and discrimination has sown hatred and conflict; our own desire for self-preservation taken at the exclusion of others. And yet throughout history the Bible has called Christians to live beyond hatred and fear, demonstrating a radical hospitality where the stranger finds welcome and refuge is provided for those who are oppressed.”

John Dorhauer, general minister and president of the United Church of Christ, wrote an essay calling to

“remember the people behind the policies” in which he said, “I wonder why the richest nation on earth is being asked to hate and fear.”

World Renew, the relief organization serving the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America, “understands that citizenship in the kingdom of God obligates us to the highest law: love for God and for our neighbours. Exercising this love should lead us to advocate for laws that will mandate the just and humane treatment of immigrant peoples;

indeed, love for the immigrant should lead us to expand and not retract our refugee resettlement programs.”

In addition, hundreds of sisters and brothers from member churches have signed an interfaith, public letter supporting refugee resettlement.

Meeting in Lebanon in 2015, the WCRC Executive Committee issued a statement call-

ing on our member churches, among other items, to:

- Join us in a fresh sense of solidarity with Christians in the Middle East and a lasting commitment to the wellbeing of all people of this region.
- Welcome the refugees as neighbours rather than treat them as “others.”
- Not ignore or allow our governments to ignore the places of massive suffering or their contribution to it.
- Live and to pray in the spirit of Isaiah 58:6-12.

We again renew this call and urge our members to:

- petition their national governments to end the violence in the Middle East,
- petition their national governments to pressure the U.S. government to change its policies,
- support our sisters and brothers in the United States who work to welcome people in need and overturn their government’s unjust policies towards those most in need.

We also call for prayers for those directly impacted by this executive order—for those families that remain forcibly separated, for those whose lives were abruptly disrupted, for those demonstrating for justice and for those working to assist these victims of violence and injustices. ●



International forum calls for a prophetic voice

In order to identify and search the future directions of the church ministries in Taiwan, an unprecedented seminar, “International Forum on the Mission of the Church in Taiwan Today,” was held by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) at the Presbyterian Bible College in February.

Approximately 190 pastors, elders, theologians, scholars and representatives from 42 ecumenical churches and institutes around the world, were invited to take part into this seminar. This included Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary and Yueh-Wen Lu, WCRC vice president. Discussion focused on Taiwan’s current social, economic and political situations and urgent ecumenical issues, such as transitional justice, gender justice, economic justice, climate change, youth role in the church, the role of church as the prophet and ecumenical cooperation.

In the forum’s opening service, unveiled by the renowned string orchestra of Der-Seng Presbyterian Church of So-shan Presbytery and Tayal Presbytery’s Shepherd Chorus, Sudu Tada, moderator of the PCT General Assembly, delivered his sermon, “Let’s Eat Together!,” encouraging ecumenical partner churches and the PCT to accommodate each other in God’s love.

Lyim Hong-tiong, general secretary of the PCT, said 2016 is a brand new start for Taiwan as President Tsai Ing-wen became the first female president in Taiwanese history and the KMT lost its majority in the Congress. Facing these critical changes and issues occurred inside Taiwan’s domestic environment, be it social, economic or political, the PCT expects to work with ecumenical partners to figure out the meanings and visions of “the Mission of the Church in Taiwan.”

François Chih-chung Wu, deputy minister of the Taiwan Foreign Department, addressed the assembly and gave his best wishes and warm



Image courtesy of Taiwan Church Newspaper

welcome to all participating members. Wu said, in 2016 Taiwan had achieved the third party alternation in the presidential election and had been accredited as the most free countries, even surpassing the ranking of United States, after a decade of efforts, and this is a very remarkable achievement. During the development of Taiwan’s democracy after 1987, Wu highly confirmed and appreciated the pioneering contributions made by the PCT.

The concluding session of this international forum, was moderated by Ferguson and Professor Albert Lin, a famous human rights campaigner for love and non-violence. Many comments reflected participants’ understanding about why the PCT proposed Taiwan’s self-determination as the best way to stand by Taiwanese society, her suffering history under colonial regimes and the people’s zealous quest for freedom and democracy.

To clarify the priority between the PCT’s ecumenical projects and her domestic ministries, promote more ecumenical and cross-denomi-

national cooperation, and improve the PCT’s relationships with China’s church, some ecumenical partner churches even suggested to set up a regular Taiwan Ecumenical Forum as a platform for civics activities and dialogues.

As Taiwan’s isolated colonial history and why PCT had to take up the cross and the suffering of the Taiwanese people were further understood through this international seminar, many ecumenical partner churches pledged to work with the PCT under a common vision that God blesses us with an abundant living life, fighting against the globalized empire and all its forms of injustice! ●

—Reported by Lin Jin-chia;
translated by Peter Wolfe

Visita pastoral de apoyo a la implementación del acuerdo de paz en Colombia

El 20 de marzo una delegación internacional conformada por el Rev. Chris Ferguson, secretario general de la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas-CMIR, la Rev. Gloria Ulloa, presidenta del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias-CMI para América Latina y el Caribe y el Rev. Milton Mejía, secretario general del Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias-CLAI participaron de una visita pastoral organizada por la Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia a la Zona Veredal de Transición y Normalización-ZVTN, de Paz ubicada en Iconozo, Tolima donde 390 miembros de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-FARC están ubicados como parte del proceso de transición para la dejación de las armas y la reincorporación a la vida civil.

Durante la visita pastoral la delegación se reunió y dialogó con Isabela Sanroque y Carlos Alberto Nariño de la Comisión de Organización del Bloque Oriental Jorge Briceño y otros miembros de las FARC, quienes compartieron el proceso que están viviendo en esta etapa de implementación de los acuerdos de paz con el

gobierno del presidente Santos. Todos y todas manifestaron que a pesar del incumplimiento del gobierno colombiano en algunos asuntos que se acordaron para la ubicación en estas zonas, mantienen su compromiso indeclinable con el cumplimiento de acuerdo de paz que firmaron con el gobierno colombiano.

La delegación también visitó la Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz el 21 de marzo y se reunió con Juan Manuel Pérez y María Prado, a quienes manifestaron la inmensa preocupación por el incremento de las amenazas y los cerca de 130 de asesinatos de defensores de derechos humanos, reclamantes de tierra y líderes sociales que trabajan por la paz durante 2016 y los últimos meses de 2017. De igual manera compartieron su sentir por las condiciones en que están viviendo los miembros de las FARC en la zona veredal que visitaron e instó al gobierno para mejorar las viviendas, la alimentación, proveer ropa y cumplir de manera plena con lo acordado para el traslado a estas zonas y en el acuerdo de paz.

Al concluir la visita pastoral la delegación internacional valoró el

compromiso del gobierno colombiano y las FARC para avanzar en el proceso de implementación del acuerdo de paz, considerando que es urgente garantizar la seguridad de las personas que defienden los derechos humanos, reclaman tierra y trabajan por la paz; así como agilizar la adecuación de las ZVTN que permitan una vida digna a los miembros de las FARC que están en proceso de reincorporación a la vida civil. Junto con esto, la delegación hace un llamado a las iglesias y a la familia ecuménica internacional a fortalecer el acompañamiento al proceso de implementación del acuerdo de paz contribuyendo de manera específica con la presencia de testigos ecuménicos de paz que aporten en la protección de comunidades y líderes y lideresas que están en peligro, así como con aprendizajes y apoyando experiencias pedagógicas de reconciliación y convivencias en paz en Colombia. ●



News from around the Communion



In mid-December, members of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) Council visited WCRC offices to meet with WCRC officers and staff. Through both informal discussions and formal presentations a better understanding of each other was formed, and ways were explored for closer cooperation in the future.

A special focus was the many activities in the coming year—the 500th Reformation Jubilee—which the EKD is utilizing to not only commemorate but to “rediscover God for our lives and our churches—and what this all means for the world we live in,” said Irmgard Schwaetzer, the president of the EKD synod.

She also noted the appropriateness of holding the WCRC General Council in Leipzig as it is a “city of renewal and transformation...and shows that church can be a place where change starts for the whole of civil society.”

WCRC President Jerry Pillay responded by saying, “It is our joy to be part of the Reformation Jubilee, and we want to thank the EKD for their support for our General Council.”



Najla Kassab, a member of the WCRC Executive Committee, is the second woman to be ordained by the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon at a service in March in Beirut. Both Chris Ferguson, general secretary, and Dora Arce Valentin, executive secretary for justice, were in attendance, along with other ecumenical guests and ministers.

From the General Secretary

Continued from page 16

This Lent the strong truth is that hope comes as God’s gift, even as we face the reality of sin and death, carrying in our body the broken bodies and death of those that suffer. **AND YET** the extraordinary power of God and the life of Jesus is **ALSO** made visible made real through us.

Every visit to communities afflicted by militarism, religiously “justified” violence, overwhelming racism, ravaging violence against women bursts forth with this unshakable and integral truth: Our faith is all about facing reality **AND YET** receiving the gift of hope. We boldly bear the bodies broken by death and **ALSO** make the life of Jesus visible.

We are preparing together for our General Council meeting in Leipzig, Germany, at the end of June this year, drawing on the rich and deep traditions of over 500 years of the Protestant Reformation(s). We turn to this extraordinary power and in the prayer that is our Council theme we call out: “Living God, renew and Transform us” so that the life of Jesus, the life of the world, may be made visible in our bodies. ●



Members of the General Council Rules and Procedures Team worked on finalizing the details of the discernment and consensus processes at a recent meeting in the WCRC’s offices in Hannover, Germany.



General Secretary Chris Ferguson was in India twice in the last few months. His first visit was to the Church of South India’s 35th Synod in January (pictured). In February he spoke at the Senate of Serampore’s convocation and received an honorary doctorate of divinity degree.

Néanmoins...aussi...

Nous portons ce trésor dans des vases de terre afin que cette puissance extraordinaire soit attribuée à Dieu, et non à nous. Nous sommes pressés de toutes parts, mais non écrasés; inquiets, mais non désespérés; persécutés, mais non abandonnés; abattus, mais non anéantis. Nous portons toujours avec nous dans notre corps l'agonie du [Seigneur] Jésus afin que la vie de Jésus soit aussi manifestée dans notre corps.

2 Corinthiens 4,7-10

Il y a des années, où le temps de la Passion exigeait de nous de surmonter l'optimisme culturel si répandu et le faux sentiment de bien-être, afin de voir le monde tel qu'il est réellement du point de vue des pauvres et des marginalisés. Certaines années, nous devions faire un effort, pour laisser la dure réalité se rapprocher de nous, pour qu'en embrassant la Résurrection nous comprenions que cela n'a de sens que sur l'arrière-fond du pouvoir réel de la mort qui détruit les vrais corps humains et qui mutile les âmes véritables et qui pose un véritable danger pour notre planète.

Probablement nous sommes d'accord pour admettre que cette année-ci est différente. Ceci est un moment à la fois inéquivoque et déconcertant de l'histoire du monde, où le pouvoir de la mort, la destruction, le racisme, le sexisme, la violence, la pauvreté, l'expulsion des gens et la destruction de l'environnement sont ressentis par presque tout le monde et en tout temps. Nous faisons face à des crises humanitaires et écologiques sans précédents. Les anciens paradigmes et vieilles conceptions ne nous donnent pas de réponses et semblent faire partie du problème.

Dans mon ministère comme Secrétaire Général de la CMER en accord avec le Président Jerry Pillay, mes autres collègues, les membres du bureau, du Comité exécutif et des Conseils des régions j'ai expliqué que la grande majorité de nos églises membres se situent sur la cruelle ligne de coupe de cette réalité turbulente. Ainsi nous n'avons pas besoin de faire un effort, pour nous rappeler la souffrance des pauvres et des marginalisés ou pour que notre confiance envers les droits de l'Homme et la Justice soient ébranlés, en ce temps de Carême Nous sommes confrontés, chaque jour, à ces réalités à grande échelle.

Mes derniers voyages m'ont conduit en Inde, en Colombie, au Nigeria, à Taiwan et au Liban. En beaucoup d'endroits la réalité des corps violemment rompus était évidente. Dans notre corps nous portons la souffrance des victimes de la violence, telles que Jésus en fut une. Les femmes deviennent victimes de violence sexuelle. La pauvreté et la faim causent des ravages incroyables. Différentes forces chassent les gens de leurs maisons et de leurs pays. La vérité que nous révèle la foi, c'est le simple fait que nos églises sont profondément enracinées dans la réalité de ce monde. La situation actuelle est scandaleuse et de maintes façons insupportable.

Ici, à Hanovre, en Allemagne, j'ai un collaborateur qui m'incite toujours à écrire quelque chose d'encourageant et plein d'espoir. Et bien sûr, la grande richesse que représentent mes voyages et l'accompagnement de nos

églises membres en ces temps, c'est qu'il n'y a plus de distance ou d'écart entre la compréhension de la réalité de la mort que « nous portons toujours avec nous dans notre corps » à cause de la mort de Jésus, comme l'écrit l'apôtre Paul – Et ceci est bien la réalité de notre époque qui témoigne de « cette puissance extraordinaire attribuée à Dieu, et non à nous. »

Le puissant témoignage de nos églises dans leur contexte spécifique consiste en ce qu'elles vivent complètement et sans failles la vérité évangélique de 2 Corinthiens 4 :

« Nous sommes pressés de toutes parts, **néanmoins** nous ne sommes pas écrasés;
Inquiets, **néanmoins** pas désespérés;
Persécutés, **néanmoins** nous ne sommes pas abandonnés;
Abattus, **néanmoins** pas anéantis. »

Nous voyons dans la vie et le témoignage de notre église la forte et dure réalité, qu'alors que nous embrassons la réalité de la souffrance et des corps rompus des pauvres et marginalisés, des peuple souffrants et de notre monde qui souffre, nous embrassons en même temps la mort de Jésus, et en faisant ceci, c'est **aussi** la vie de Jésus qui devient visible en nous.

La puissante vérité de ce temps de la Passion c'est que Dieu nous donne l'espoir en cadeau, alors même que nous sommes face à face avec le péché et la mort et que nous portons en nous les corps rompus et la mort d ceux qui souffrent. **Néanmoins** la « puissance extraordinaire » de Dieu et la vie de Jésus deviennent **aussi** vraies et visibles à travers nous.

Chaque visite auprès de communautés affligées par le militarisme, la violence « au nom de la religion », la violence destructrice envers les femmes révèle cette vérité inébranlable que notre foi signifie que nous percevons la réalité et que **néanmoins** nous recevons aussi l'espoir en cadeau. Nous portons avec courage les corps rompus par la mort et révélons aussi la vie de Jésus.

Nous sommes en train de préparer ensemble notre Assemblée Générale, fin juin de cette année, à Leipzig, en Allemagne. Nous avons recours aux riches et profondes traditions de la Réforme protestante d'il y a plus de 500 ans. C'est vers cette « puissance extraordinaire » de Dieu que nous nous tournons et c'est avec les mots de prière qui sont le thème de notre Assemblée Générale que nous nous exclamons : « **Dieu vivant, renouvelle et transforme-nous** » afin que la vie de Jésus, la vie du monde se manifestent dans nos corps. ●

—Chris Ferguson



Chris Ferguson
General Secretary

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

And yet...also...

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

—2 Corinthians 4:7-10 (NRSV)

There have been years when Lent requires us to push beyond a kind of popular cultural optimism and a false sense of wellbeing and confront the world as it really is from the perspective of the poor and marginalized. Some years we have had to push hard to let in the harsh realities so that as we embrace resurrection we do so knowing it only makes sense given the real power of death that destroys real bodies and cripples real souls and endangers our planet in real ways.

We would probably all agree this is not one of those years. This is a distinct if confusing moment in the life of the world. Where the power of death, destruction, racism, sexism, violence, poverty, human displacement and environmental destruction is evident to almost all of us almost all of the time. We face humanitarian and ecological crises of an unprecedented scale. Old paradigms and prior concepts no longer provide the answers and seem, in fact, to be part of the problem.

My ministry as WCRC general secretary, together with President Jerry Pillay, other executive staff colleagues, the officers and members of the Executive Committee and Regional Councils, have made it abundantly clear that the great majority of our member churches are living at the brutal and bitter cutting edge of this turbulent reality. Lent requires no extra effort to put us in touch with the suffering of the poor and marginalized or the shaking of the assumptions about justice and human rights. We are all confronted with these large scale realities daily.

My recent visits have taken me to India, Colombia, Nigeria, Taiwan and Lebanon. In many places the reality of human bodies broken by the violence of death was evident. We bear in our body the suffering of the victims of violence as Jesus was. The women suffering and broken by gender based violence. The unspeakable ravages of growing poverty and hunger. The multiple forces displacing people from their homes and lands. This truth revealed through faith is also the simple fact that our churches are deeply embedded in the reality of the world. And the present times are scandalous and hard in too many ways.

Here in Hannover, Germany, I have a colleague who always presses me to be hopeful and uplifting in what I write. And of course the great gift of visiting and accompanying our churches at this present time is that there is simply no gap, no distance between owning and embracing the reality of the death and brokenness that as Paul says “we always carry in the body through the death of Jesus”—and that is the reality of our present times and witness to the “extraordinary power that belongs to God and does not come from us.”

The powerful witness of our member churches in every context is that they live the Gospel truth of 2 Corinthians 4 as one seamless, whole truth.

“Afflicted in every way **AND YET** not crushed.”

“Perplexed **AND YET** not driven to despair.”

“Persecuted **AND YET** not forsaken.”

“Struck down **AND YET** not destroyed.”

We see in the life and witness of our church the hard and powerful truth that as we embrace the reality of the suffering and broken bodies of the poor, the marginalized and the suffering people and planet we embrace the death of Jesus and as we do so the LIFE of Jesus is **ALSO** made visible through our bodies.

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WCRC
Calvin Centre
Knochenhauerstrasse 42
30159 Hannover, Germany

tel: +49 511 8973 8310
fax: +49 511 8973 8311

wcrc@wcrc.eu
www.wcrc.ch
[facebook.com/worldcommunion](https://www.facebook.com/worldcommunion)
twitter.com/reformedcomunio

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