

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Rev Chris Ferguson

God of Life, Lead us on your path of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation

*“...then...you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in.” (Isaiah 58:6-12)*

1. I begin my first report as general secretary to the executive committee giving thanks to God for the gift of this Communion of churches and for the vision, leadership, faithfulness, dedication, passion and commitment of all those who have worked, prayed and gone the second mile to bring us to where we are today: Called to Communion and Committed to Justice. I specifically want to express deep appreciation for the ministry and service of Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi. Thanks to his graciousness and diligence the handover and transition were smooth and efficient. And every day we continue to see the fruits of his 14 years of leadership. I also offer a special thanks to the president who has taken special pains to support and guide me, and to the staff that have supported me and born with me in what is always a challenging time as styles change and new leadership comes on board. I appreciate beyond words the many, many expressions of support and prayers for me and for Susan, my wife, as we have taken up this new responsibility.
2. As our theme highlights, we are called to be on God’s “path of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation.” And as the verse from Isaiah tells us we have a specific calling to walk that path as those who build up which is destroyed, to unite that which is divided, to repair the breach, so that the places where human beings are meant to dwell are fit to live in, once again.
3. I give this report in Lebanon. Our global context as a Communion is clear. This gripping call to restore streets to live in comes as we meet right beside the ongoing and utter devastation of war. The churches that are hosting us both serve and count as their own members those who have no longer any street to live in.
4. Over ten years ago the WARC in Accra began a confession crying out for lives in a scandalous world. Such is still the fundamental truth of our context, the first truth about where we are on our path: God’s *oikoumene* is facing great and unprecedented threats to the lives of all peoples and creation itself. Recent evidence includes the hurricane in Vanuatu and earthquake in Nepal, terrorist massacres justified by religion in Kenya (echoed in other parts of Africa and the Middle East), a complex and brutal war in Syria, the unresolved and perilous divisions on the Korean peninsula, xenophobia and conflict in South Africa, growing resistance and protest against racist police repression and brutality in the USA, threats against those who work for peace and defend the landless in Colombia, tragic conflict and division in South Sudan, spiralling human trafficking around the world and the unspeakable tragedy of migrants dying as they attempt to find asylum and streets to live in.
5. The examples are virtually unending and they touch all part of this world loved by God, and clearly our Communion is present and witnessing and often our own family also suffering in all these broken, devastated and destroyed places. And yet the prophet insists: “if you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom like noonday, the Lord will guide you continually...”
6. I give thanks that God’s guidance has lead us firmly towards the greater unity of this family of Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, United and Uniting, Waldensian and other first Reformation churches. We know by God’s grace that this path of justice, peace and reconciliation requires us to repair what is broken and divided between and amongst us and ever deepen our unity. We have learned that communion building is inseparable from justice, peace and reconciliation.

7. From the 2010 Uniting General Council (UGC) the WCRC has been working through the challenges of building and building up our Communion and meeting all the challenges that has brought in facing tough financial and sustainability issues, leading to a move of offices, while articulating and implementing a strategic plan and struggling with the task of electing a new general secretary. Taken all together the last number of years has required considerable dedication to institutional and organizational dimensions of our communion, and while programmes have been well done and important work has continued, in truth full attention to both the significant challenges of this broken world and building up our Communion have suffered.
8. Two years from our next general council we are not as far along the path set out in the bold vision from the UGC as we had hoped and prayed. Our executive committee theme has us pray again to God to take up within even more clarity of purpose the central mission that God has given our Communion. With the move behind us and a new general secretary in place we have opportunity to re-center the work of this executive, the staff, the regions and all the Communion on God's fierce call to unite that which is divided, to repair the breach and in all things "live out the Communion of Reformed Churches, participating in God's mission, that all may experience the fullness of life in Jesus Christ."
9. I make my first report to you, then, guided by the stark reality of the world in which we live, the vision set out by the UGC and expressed in the 2011 Strategic Plan, nurtured and inspired by the call to communion and commitment to justice as embodied in the Accra Confession. My report attempts to reflect on the mission statement as articulated in the strategic plan and uses the following statement of key directions as a framework:
 - (6.1) The WCRC aims, by the end of 2017, to be known as a communion that united reformed churches in God's mission in the world. Our internal relationships will evidence the oneness for which Jesus prayed. The WCRC will have significantly contributed to the world church's awareness of and ability to address theologically and practically, issues of justice, equality, reconciliation and peace building. The WCRC will be the place to go to for theological and practical resources on these issues. The WCRC will be an interwoven network committed to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world, and will be widely acknowledged as an effective convener of significant training and resourcing for leaders and future leaders so that they may contribute theologically and practically to the mission of the member churches. The core of the network will be sustainable with core functions funded with revenue from member churches. The WCRC, at every level, embarks on this journey using the following key directions: Mission, Communion, Justice, Theology and Ecumenical engagement.
10. The strategic plan also stresses new ways of working. The emphasis is on closeness with regional bodies, national churches and relating to local congregations. Regional empowerment and networking are foregrounded. Developing the capacity of member churches to undertake life-giving projects with reference to the Partnership Fund and others is in the plan. Young people are lifted up as key to this new way of working. Great emphasis on work with ecumenical partners is highlighted. Strengthening partnerships both as method and goal is underlined. Specific focus is given in the plan to working with EDAN to ensure that the WCRC takes into account persons of disability and disability issue.
11. My report is not an evaluation or assessment of where we are with our vision and goals as such. I am, of course, coming into the middle of the story and only with nine months direct experience. Together with the president I have, however, seen my role as bringing the plan back into play as a tool for the executive, staff and regions to re-center, re-focus and re-invigorate the life, witness and programmes of the Communion after several years of having to focus on internal issues and transitions. As we hear the reports about the programme priorities and our other work we do so not only out of appreciation for hard work well done but with the critical eye to see how we can now move further and closer to the bold vision in both communion and justice that God has set.
12. My initial overall assessment as the incoming general secretary led me to focus on some specific areas that I judged to be imperative given our recent history. Due to the combined realities of a financial

crisis, the move from Geneva (and specifically the Ecumenical Centre) to Hannover (out of the ecumenical mainstream and symbolically farther from the Global South) and the prolonged process in electing a general secretary there was a general perception, both within our membership and the wider ecumenical family, of a weakened, disheartened WCRC withdrawing from ecumenical relations, distant from its members outside of Europe and simply concentrating on survival. I felt it was extremely important to immediately address this perception by adding my personal presence and energy to vigorous programme of visits, participation, solidarity and accompaniment to member churches, regions, ecumenical partners and processes. I will detail these further on in my report. It was imperative to connect with our membership after the move and evidence in real terms to both members and ecumenical partners that we are very much active and present both in our ecumenical contributions and in our Communion strengthening and building. We are not focusing on transition and survival but on communion, justice and transformation. The tenth year commemoration of the Accra Confession with its regional events provided an excellent opportunity to disabuse all of any false idea that the move to Hannover had somehow sidelined us or signalled less interest in the whole Communion.

13. An additional discovery that required much additional attention was that the office in Hannover was and still is very much in a period of transition in terms of many basic administrative and organizational systems and procedures. The database was woefully out of date and simply not fulfilling our needs. The filing system had never been effectively re-established after the move. The tracking and monitoring of reporting and relations with donors and partners continues to need attention and restructuring. The finance office had to spend much of the first half of 2014 correcting errors in the accounting for 2013 due to inherited problems. The result was by the fall of 2014 no significant bookkeeping entries had been made, and we were unable to track our income or expenditures effectively throughout 2014. This also caused a serious delay in sending our membership fee reminders. In addition the very serious flaws and inaccuracies in the database meant that extra efforts were needed to assure that all members were informed of their fee obligations. Steps have been taken to bring the systems up to speed. It is still a work in progress. More details specifically about finance will follow below.
14. Similarly, when I began in September I was met with deep and unresolved issues within the staff team. Some of the stresses and tensions of the move and budget pressure were dealt with directly. Werner Joecker was asked to move from a half time programme assistant to a full time position, and he assumed responsibility for the Partnership Fund and also special assignments such as the database problems. This has proved to be a constructive step and we are thankful to Werner for his dedication and expertise. Initially Viktoria Koczian's contract ended after her six month probation period. She was given a three month transitional contract. After much consultation and deliberation a new six month temporary position was created as programme assistant, split between the two offices. When that contract ended—and following a full and exhaustive review of staff needs and evaluation—Viktoria was not offered a new contract. A job search has been conducted and a new programme assistant for the two offices will begin work June 1. The staff have worked hard and faithfully, but there have been very many tensions and issues that have troubled the team. There have been ongoing attempts to work things through, and the president has helpfully been involved at several stages while the officers in their role as the personnel committee have been informed.

Justice and Partnership

15. **Tenth anniversary of the Accra Confession.** The executive secretary facilitated a series of consultations in regional councils that culminated with a global gathering. These consultations served to celebrate the Accra Confession but more importantly to evaluate its impact and to reflect critically on and make recommendations about how to faithfully live out in each changed context. After the CANAAC/CANACOM meeting in March, AIPRAL met in Barranquilla, Colombia, in June. In September the NEAAC consultation gathered in Taipei hosted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. The ACRC, in partnership with the justice and partnership office, held its consultation in Nairobi, Kenya. WCRC Europe contributed to the global efforts by organizing a meeting on asylum and migration in October. In November, together with ecumenical partners, representatives of the regions met to articulate a global perspective on the Accra Confession today and to prepare recommendations for the

Communion. The global gathering challenged us as WCRC “to recognize that the world and economic powers look different today than they did at the 2004 drafting of the Accra Confession. Neo-liberal economics, race and patriarchy are entangled. Economic inequality has increased exponentially and the obstinate persistence of racism and racial tensions escalate. Group identities that are most influenced by the effects and realities of empire include but are not limited to discrimination based on caste, indigeneity, gender, sexuality, and disabilities.” The recommendation to us is “to address the effects of an unjust neo-liberal economic system in a more integrated manner that analyzes and responds to these unjust social, political and economic realities. These interconnections include: growing inequalities that link to human trafficking, displacement and migration; environmental racism, the dangers of nuclear power plants and their vulnerability in the midst of extreme climate change; and political crises which lead to religious and political fundamentalism. We also cannot ignore the deepening of the Palestine-Israel conflict as well as other conflicts around the world. In the spirit of our theme the consultations have called us as a Communion to re-invigorate our engagement with the Accra Confession and to take up the vocation of being repairers of the breach and restores of streets to live in.” Specifically the November consultation recommended these action areas as part of the “urgent prophetic response” to the signs of the times: critical reading of scripture and creative resources for congregations to witness to the God of Life, caste, climate change, gender and sexuality, human trafficking, immigration and migration, the New International Financial and Economic Architecture and racism, among others.

16. The final documents from all of these consultations are attached to the report of the justice and partnership office. The consultations not only contributed to further promotion of the Accra Confession but also to renewing and energizing connections with some regions and the WCRC. This was a constructive example of regional empowerment as per the strategic plan.
17. The justice and partnership desk continues to develop new ways to inform about and promote not only the Accra Confession as such but the confession as part of a deeper and broader witness for the imperative of economic and ecological justice as a faith imperative. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and our website are becoming more and more useful tools to promote our work and to connect with member churches, regions, partners, NGOs and others.
18. **Oikotree.** We continue our active commitment with the Oikotree movement including sharing leadership in the facilitating group and in the recent workshop on transformative theological education.
19. **Human trafficking.** This has been an important expanding priority for WCRC justice and partnership work. Our programme creates awareness among member churches and ecumenical partners while making the link between human trafficking and global economic injustice. We have created and supported networks of churches committed to working on the issue of human trafficking while working more closely with our UN office in New York in the advocacy dimension of the work. The “Broken for You” Campaign was launched for Lent 2015 to put resources directly in the hands of congregations. There was significant activity on Facebook in response to the material and indications that it has been used and appreciated in Europe, Latin America, the USA and Asia. The evaluation process is ongoing. A special thanks to Joanna Hipp, Ryan Smith and Sergio Garcia for their contributions to the work. Along with the active involvement of the working group in writing the material we would like to note the link between advocacy and action and theological reflection which has been a feature of this activity and which we hope to expand with deeper involvement of young theologians and GIT participants in the future.
20. **New Economic and Financial Architecture (NIFEA).** The justice and partnership secretary, together with staff persons from WCC, CWM and LWF, have been providing support material and to advance the implementation of the NIFEA initiative. The 2014 executive had stressed the urgency of implementing this programme. The WCRC has been committed to moving forward with a joint ecumenical initiative based on the earlier cooperation with the São Paulo declaration. Unfortunately the four general secretaries have not reached a workable consensus on the joint or common nature of this urgent advocacy initiative and the priorities. This has been a great disappointment for all. I continue to look for ways to ensure that we can proceed ecumenically. If this is not resolved soon we will have

to rethink our approach. The specific initiative about a global ecumenical school for economics is also on hold.

21. **Gender justice: Scholarship for women.** There is one ongoing scholarship from previous years. We received nine new applications. Only one woman from Burkina Faso qualified, and there is one potential candidate from Venezuela. Obviously there is much more to be done to support our churches in identifying women for theological education and ordination. From our global office, we are making the scholarship more visible through social media: using the website, Facebook and the *Reformed Communiqué* with stories told about the impact of this program for women currently in ministry and their churches. **Gender violence.** As part of our partnership with our UN office, we continue to promote the Orange Day, SayNO-Unite and HEforSHE campaigns, all of them designed to create awareness about violence against women and children and to work to end it. We continue our engagement with the We Will Speak Out Coalition (WWSO). Our intern Joanna Hipp has participated in events and movements raising awareness, advocating and producing material to increase our Communion's involvement in these campaigns. The WCRC's presence in these advocacy spaces has been noted and appreciated. **UN Commission on the Status of Women.** Joanna Hipp represented the WCRC in the 59th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which focused on the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Her active involvement in a wide variety of activities and events as well her regular posts and communications contributed to the ecumenical impact at CSW and to raising the WCRC's profile in UN advocacy. **Sylvia Michel Prize.** Yvette Rabemila and Brigitte Rabarijaona, both ordained ministers in the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar, were awarded the 2014 Sylvia Michel Prize at a worship service in Heiden, Switzerland, on Sunday, 8 March 2015. Our executive for communications was present during the ceremony and the previous meeting with PaNKS (Swiss women presidents of the Reformed Churches in Switzerland) in which we reaffirmed our commitment to continue our partnership with them and with the prize.
22. **Critical analysis of the perspective of Uniting General Council recommendations and the strategic plan.** At the request of the president and the general secretary the executive secretary for justice included in her annual report critical reflections on the work of her office in light of the Strategic Plan. **Linking justice and communion.** This has been a fundamental approach to the programme work as has grounding the work theologically and biblically. **Close work with regions and networking.** This is a basic work method for the office, and in some cases regional councils are proactive, others are struggling to rebuild networks and empower themselves as regions. Building active networks has been a challenge. There are two networks but lack of involvement of the members and lack of budget for activities have been obstacles. The office has tried to develop a strategy of using working groups and so far with one exception it has not been as successful as wanted and needed. **Advocacy.** This is crucial but we are doing less than we should be doing. It is recommended that we reflect on the role of the UN office in New York and seek ways to make our member churches' advocacy needs more visible through them. Our work with them on CWS and human trafficking has been important but more could be done. **Partnerships ecumenically and with others.** We have a long way to go in terms of working in partnership methodologically and engaging in work with other partners. So far, our presence as part of the facilitating group of Oikotree gives us a space, as well as our participation in the WWSO coalition. We are trying to engage other partners like the World Student Christian Federation in our focus on youth empowerment as a way to develop other levels of partnership. **Links with the other key directions in the Strategic plan:** Areas that require more development:
- **Mission**
 - Interfaith dialogues
 - Immigrant churches, by and among indigenous people. In the case of immigrant churches, the only thing we are doing is through the presence of the Hispanic Caucus of the PCUSA and their active role as part of AIPRAL and CANAAC. They were present in both of the consultation celebrating the anniversary of the Accra Confession and are very present in our social media.
 - **Covenanting for Justice, Living out the Accra Confession**
 - We need to improve the way we work with our Theology and Mission desk.

- We recognize that almost nothing has been done programmatically about climate justice but having it as a transversal issue on all of what we do from our justice desk, like NIFEA, Accra consultations and human trafficking approaches.

Gender Justice

- On gender leadership and power, we still have so much to do. The consultations celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession showed us how much is needed to work more intentionally on these issues. Even the participation of women in these consultations was a challenge for some regional bodies.
- The issue of the ordination of women, according to the strategic plan, is to engage not only the secretariat and the core group members but the entire executive committee. Team visits were suggested by the strategic plan involving all of the secretariat. So far, we have done nothing in that sense. A more intentional strategy needs to be settled if we want to move forward with the challenges we have as a Communion on this matter

Justice, peace and reconciliation

- We have done nothing about indigenous people. We will have to encourage regional councils and member churches working with indigenous communities to generate initiatives and work in partnership with the justice desk to address this.
- In partnership with the office of the general secretary and the communication desk we are trying to accompany the member churches in their struggles for justice. The need of better networks and the link with the regions is crucial to us in our commitment to be in solidarity with them.

Theology, Mission and Communion

23. The highlight in 2014 for the office of Theology, Mission and Communion (TMC) was the **Global Institute of Theology (GIT)** in San José, Costa Rica, 5-28 July. Thirty students from all over the world attended this GIT. We had a team of lecturers from various countries but half of them from Costa Rica. The theme of the core course was “Transforming Mission, Community and Church.” This theme was developed in three sub-courses: Mission as Evangelism and Service, Places of Epiphany and Reformed presence in the world and The Reformed Church challenging the ecumenical world. In addition to his overall leadership the TMC executive secretary taught the last sub-course. An important feature of the GIT was the exposure programme to church, society and nature. And as always with the GIT most important was the building up of a community of students and lecturers and the interaction that goes with this. The global division in wealth, for example, is visible within the small GIT community. This brings forth lively discussions but also mental and spiritual challenges. This was evidenced also in the vibrant and participative daily worship. The 2014 GIT was hosted by the *Universidad Biblico Latinoamericana*. An excellent job was done by their staff, especially our contact person Karla Koll. Obtaining visas for all the participants was a real challenge and it was uncertain up to the very last minute as to whether or not we could hold the event. Costa Rica has a policy of restricted entry, and being a small country the number of consulates and embassies is limited. With the delay in visa approvals and extra travel to obtain the visas the costs were greater than expected, and the event was US\$30,000 over budget. Sadly, in the end eight students were denied visas. Almost all students submitted essays and a number of the best essays will be published in *Reformed World*, 2014/2. The overall goal of the GIT is the training of future leadership within the Reformed community from an ecumenical perspective. That goal has been reached this time again, and in general the evaluation of the GIT by the students was positive. It is planned to have the next GIT to coincide with the WCRC’s 2017 general council. Preparations for the GIT are starting now, including the fundraising for this event.

24. The TMC office has led three events related to Ecumenical Dialogues. First there was a preparatory meeting in London about the **Anglican-Reformed Dialogue**. This dialogue will take place 24 October to 1 November 2015 in India. Those who attended the preparatory meeting were the two co-chairs and the two co-secretaries: Elizabeth Welch (United Reformed Church UK, Reformed co-chair), Bishop David Chillingworth (Scottish Episcopal Church, Anglican co-chair), Alyson Barnett-Cowan (Anglican co-secretary), Douwe Visser (Reformed co-secretary). John Gibaut will be replacing Alyson Barnett-Cowan on the Anglican side. The overall theme of the dialogues is “Communion.”

25. The office also facilitated the first meeting in the **Pentecostal-Reformed** round of dialogues. This meeting took place in Berekfürdő in Hungary, 16-21 November. In total there were 13 delegates, seven Reformed and six Pentecostal. Also present were our intern Fundiswa Kobo and the then assistant in the office of TCM, Viktoria Koczian. The overall theme of this round of dialogue is "Mission." This first meeting focused on "Ministering to the needs of the world, Mission as evangelization and diaconate." Two main papers about this topic were presented, from both the Pentecostal and Reformed sides. These papers led to lively discussions. On the last day, however, it was difficult to come to agreement about the topic for the second meeting, scheduled 3-10 December 2015. We left the meeting undecided about this. The delegations also met members of both the Reformed Church in Hungary and the Pentecostal Church in Hungary.
26. The third event in the programme of dialogues was the fifth meeting in **the Catholic-Reformed** round of dialogues, meeting this year in Ghent, Belgium. There were 15 delegates, nine from the Reformed side and six from the Catholic side. This meeting was the final meeting of the two delegations in plenary, and most of the time was dedicated to producing a draft of the final report, to be finalised this autumn. The theme is: "Justification and Sacramentality, the Christian Community as an agent for Justice." This meeting also discussed the possibility of the WCRC affiliating with the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity would very much welcome this. The 2010 Uniting General Council gave mandate to consult the member churches about this. I have already urged the TMC executive to undertake this consultation immediately.
27. Regarding **Reformed World**, the first issue of 2014 was a special issue dedicated to Setri Nyomi. This issue was presented during a festive meeting of the executive committee in Hannover. Setri greatly appreciated this tribute. Issues number two and three of 2014 have been fully prepared with articles received and edited. The first one of these two is dedicated to the GIT 2014 with essays from students and an introductory article written by the dean of the GIT, Peter Wyatt. The second of the two issues has reactions from a variety of authors on the WCC document "Together towards Life." Unfortunately neither issue has been published and distributed yet. The TMC office takes responsibility for this unfortunate delay and together with the general secretary and the communications secretary will work to ensure that the three issues of *Reformed World* will appear on time.
28. The **network of theologians** had a meeting of its theme group "Sola Scriptura" 28 June - 1 July 2014. They discussed a draft of the study document that will be published this year. Another of the four theme groups, "Church and Society," was supposed to meet in November during the global Accra consultation organized by the justice and partnership office, but in the end only two members were present there. The two other groups, "Places of Epiphany" and "Churches beyond the Differences" did not meet in 2014.
29. A follow-up consultation for "**Mission in the Frontline**" was planned in Oman for 20-26 April 2015. However contacts with the co-organizers are not easy, and the visa procedures are difficult for some participants that would be involved. In consultation with the general secretary it was decided that we should organize this consultation somewhere else and at another time. Special attention is to be given to assure that the consultation helps strengthen and support the on-the-ground work of churches and regions in difficult situations such as the Middle East.
30. The work of the **John Knox** programme commission is something the TMC secretary was asked to stay involved in. Planning of a consultation on "Religions and State" is quite advanced. This consultation will take place 11-16 October 2015 at the John Knox Centre in Geneva.
31. The TMC secretary has been active in publishing articles and contributing to **theological production**. For example, publishing the article: "Having the Words of Eternal Life, the Vital Message of Life" in the Festschrift for Prof. Michael Weinrich. The secretary has also attended the annual meeting of **NetAct**—a network of African Theological Institutions which is a WCRC affiliated member. Additionally, the TMC secretary represents the WCRC in a **network of German theologians of the Reformed Alliance**. This is an important activity drawing us nearer to our German member churches. The TMC office is also preparing a consultation for the autumn of 2015 on "secularisation in Europe"

along with WCC, CWM and EMW as part of the process of engaging with the WCC Mission document "Together Toward Life."

32. This has been the first full year for the office working from Hannover; while missing frequent ecumenical contacts in Geneva, there is now a sense of being fully landed in Germany and a need to address and expand all energies to the important work of the office as part of the larger WCRC staff team.

Communications

33. Phil Tanis, the executive secretary for communications, has completed more than a year in his position. The personal and family transitions have gone smoothly. An ongoing challenge has been finding the time to properly learn **German**. In terms of work priorities it will be important to discern the benefits of becoming fluent in German against the time costs to do so, thus determining at what speed this should happen.
34. There have been other continuing challenges in the office. The impact of the geographical move of the office, combined with staff turn over, continued to be felt through the year. Much of the WCRC's **institutional memory** was lost, despite being able to contact former staff with specific questions. Contributing to this was the state of the electronic filing system, which had not yet implemented systematized filing procedures. Much time has been spent tracking down and piecing together what has happened over the last several years in order to move forward certain specific initiatives. Hans von Rütte, from the WCC archives, has been advising us on filing systems.
35. A similar discovery was made with the **database**: it had not been effectively updated for some time. With the rapid change in email addresses in general, as well as the periodic change in leadership of our member churches, we were hampered in both the sending of church membership dues notices, as well as in over all communications. Thankfully Werner Joecker was able to devote time to collecting updated information for the database; in addition, Anna Krüger obtained new contact information in the course of her financial responsibilities. Thanks must go to regional leaders, including many executive committee members, who assisted both Anna and Werner in this.
36. At the time of this writing, we are considering what database system will best serve our needs in the future. Two systems are being considered: 1) Filemaker Pro, which we currently use, and 2) Salesforce, which has been brought to our attention by the Christian Reformed Church in North America. There are a number of factors impacting the decision, including costs (both financial and time) and potential future uses of each system. Regardless of which system is selected, additional resources will need to be devoted to the database. A discussion of the strategic necessity of an effective database will be undertaken by the communication core group.
37. Another transition challenge that is being met concerns the closure of **Ecumenical News International** (ENI). While we continued to work with the WCC and ENI officers to formally close the organization, the ENI officers sent two email messages for us. The first was to former ENI reporters, asking who would be interested in writing for the WCRC. The result is a list of reporters from many parts of the world ready to work for us. The second message was to those who received press releases from ENI. The response to this message saw the number of those subscribing to the monthly WCRC eNews climb by several hundred.
38. Finally, the needs of the finance office continued to take the majority of Anna's time. The anticipated 50/50 split between finance and communications was revised to 70/30 as the financial needs became apparent. In reality, Anna spends closer to 90% of her time on finance responsibilities. Discussion continues between executive staff as to how to best utilize the **support staff** available. In the meantime, the assistance given by Joanna Hipp, our intern from the Presbyterian Church (USA), needs to be singled out as she has done much for communications, especially pertaining to social justice work. Paul Oppenheim, our senior volunteer has provided invaluable assistance to the communications desk, especially in the area of translations.

39. The impact of **online communication** has grown significantly in the past year. Social media has especially increased as regular posting on both Facebook and through Twitter have raised the WCRC's profile. One example: in mid-March 2014, the WCRC Facebook page had 1972 "likes" with 1800 people "reached" and 156 "engaged" in one week; a year later, there were 2557 (+30%) likes with a reach of 4112 (+128%) and 392 (+150%) engaged. Each weekday there is at least one post on Facebook and a "tweet" via Twitter, with higher activity as needed; weekends see activity whenever pertinent. Posts/tweets include calls to prayer, links to articles on the WCRC website, sharing of resources, visitors to the WCRC offices, activities of WCRC staff, news from member churches and more. A Facebook page for the WCRC's Office of Theology was also set up at the request of the executive secretary for theology. It currently has 423 likes while work continues to increase regular posts to it. The WCRC Flickr account holds high resolution images of activities, allowing for downloading by news organizations and others. A new Instagram account features pictures and short posts of WCRC staff and member activity around the world.
40. The **WCRC eNews** is now sent to over 1200 email addresses each month (double that of a year ago). The list includes all executive committee members and member churches, journalists and editors, ecumenical partners and those who are interested in the WCRC's work. The eNews features from three to five links in each edition, focusing on news and resources. It consistently exceeds "industry" averages for "opens" and "click throughs." There have been a number of other targeted mass email messages sent over the past year (including the "Broken for You" announcement and an update from the (new) general secretary). Specific messages to member churches are sent by language preference. It is anticipated that communication via mass (but targeted) emailing will increase in the coming years.
41. The **website**, thanks to a grant from *Fondation pour l'aide au protestantisme réformé* (FAP), is finally coming online in eight languages (Arabic, English, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Korean and Spanish). While the first phase of this project (with the four European languages) was completed in the months between communication secretaries, it was decided that the site could use a reorganization before bringing the other four languages online. This reorganization necessitated a significant rewriting of the content, followed by translation of the text. During this translation period, a redesign of the site was discussed, decided upon and done. Going forward it is anticipated that up to two articles per month will be translated into all eight languages. Depending on budget, additional pages and/or resources will be translated into as many of the languages as possible. The blog on the website will soon be restarted with news from churches and "Reformed Tastes" (a glimpse into WCRC members' work from around the world) as the regular features. Officers, executive committee members and staff will also be invited to participate in the blog on a periodic basis.
42. The "March" issue of the **Reformed Communiqué** features four of the languages (English, French, Indonesian and Korean) to mark the debut of the new website. There are plans to feature three other languages (plus English) in the September issue (while the June and December editions will likely be just in English). The *Communiqué* has been repositioned over the last year to act as a "best of" the articles that have already appeared on the WCRC website (outside of the general secretary's column, which will do so in the coming year). Comparing printed circulation figures (which have increased this past year) to online access (website, eNews, Facebook, etc.) shows that more people are reading the articles virtually than in printed form (which is not a surprise). While printing and mailing the *Communiqué* remains important, especially for some specific target audiences, a discussion about how much money to spend on the *Communiqué* as opposed to translation (as but one example) will be taken up by the communication core group.
43. A new **introductory brochure** for the WCRC was created in the past year in the four European languages and will also be translated into any other language as needed. A new bookmark and the annual report were also produced, and a memory stick with the WCRC's logo was made (and is being used as both a gift and as a replacement to the production of printed reports at meetings).
44. The communications secretary has traveled with fellow executive secretaries this past year to better communicate their work. He attended the start of the GIT in Costa Rica, the Accra Confession consultation in Taiwan and the Sylvia Michel prize award presentation in Switzerland. Phil joined the

incoming general secretary on an official visit to the historic concurrent general synods held in Iowa by the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America. The secretary joined a WCRC Europe delegation on an official visit to Ukraine and made a well received presentation at the CWM communication consultation in Singapore (titled “Engagement and Advocacy in the Digital Space: The Scope and Power of Electronic Communications”); he also paid a visit to several of our member churches in South Korea just prior to the CWM consultation.

45. **Future Plans.** As we are now past the half-way point to our next general council (and through most of our office transition), it is important to take a moment to reflect on the strategic plan adopted by the executive committee in 2011 from a communications perspective. Communications is categorized as one of the methodologies within the plan; put another way, effective communicating will incarnate our values. Everything we do, every way in which we show what we do, will be embedded with our values. Those values are taken directly from our constitution: “The WCRC strives to demonstrate and live the oneness in Christ we profess, to carry out its ministry in ways that enable all member churches to share their gifts, and to honour and be committed to God’s saving purposes for the transformation of the world, [is] called to respect, defend, and advance the dignity of every person, embraces God’s covenant promises for the redemption, restoration and renewal of the whole creation through Jesus Christ.” Five key directions were identified in the strategic plan; all five lead to this: “The WCRC aims, by the end of 2017, to be known as a Communion that unites Reformed churches in God’s mission in the world.” “To be known” implies that communication must be done (and done well!). Specifically, three expected outcomes were identified for communications: 1) Make visible the five key directions; 2) Make visible the involvement of regions and member churches; 3) Attract the support of new donors and retain the commitment of current donors.
46. Reflecting on the first two together, one can see that all news, features, etc., coming directly from the WCRC touch on at least one of the **five key directions**. When news from member churches is shared (whether it be a news feature or a call to prayer), it is always with one of the five in mind. The work of the general and executive secretaries also emphasizes the commitment to the five key directions. The challenge, however, lies in increasing the involvement of the regions and member churches. A meeting with regional leaders was held in 2012 that committed the WCRC to “promote and support regional activities related to WCRC’s five key directions and make them visible.”
47. Another short-term objective was to “create **regional web pages** that are coordinated in the regions.” This has not yet happened, although the Indonesian region has created a site on their own, work is being done on a CANAAC site and preliminary discussions have occurred with the ACRC about assisting in the development of a site for them. It should be decided if this objective remains viable (given the WCRC website, alternative means to communicate and language challenges even within regions) and, if so, what the WCRC communications office might do to assist.
48. The third expected outcome, pertaining to donors, also has challenges. A portion of the executive secretary’s work is dedicated to **development**. The production of the annual report and material for the annual appeal are a part of this, as is involvement in the database. The general and other two executive secretaries continue to raise funds for the organization, as well as their own programmes. A draft strategic plan for development has been developed for discussion.
49. Attention will continue on two items from last year’s report (both drawn from the strategic plan):
 - increasing networks among communicators, especially professionals in member churches;
 - enhancing contact lists for and relationships with both religious and secular media professionals
50. An increasing amount of time will also be dedicated to the **2017 General Council** over the coming year, including the development of a GC2017 app. The communications office will also work closely with the coordinator of the event as soon as s/he is brought on board.

Finances

51. The finance office is served by Gerhard Plenter and Anna Krüger.

52. The WCRC financial structure, as in previous years, is divided into core budget and programme budgets. While the core budget receives the organization's income, with membership fees, grants and donations as its main sources, and covers payroll, administration fees and WCRC's communication work, the programme budget is split into a series of programmes. Programmes are under the direction of the executive secretaries or the general secretary. They are funded through earmarked grants and donations.
53. In 2014 **the core budget** had a deficit of EUR 13,341.61 in the 2014 budget year. Funds from the Reserve Fund were allocated to balance this deficit. The Reserve Fund was therefore decreased from EUR 79,359.94 to EUR 64,320.97.
54. Here, it is important to point out that the Relocation Fund that had been opened in 2013 with the remaining funds of a special UEK relocation grant, and at the beginning of the 2014 budget year had EUR 143,989.29 was used up in its entirety.
55. Moreover, in the budget year 2013, rather than paying our Swiss human resource provider Antex according to each invoice received, rounded amounts were paid and down payments were made. Due to a lack of documents available to us at the end of the budget year 2014, we have only now found out that we had a year-end balance of CHF 42,150.95 in our favour with Antex.
56. If not for the relocation grant and this positive balance, the 2014 core deficit would have been considerably higher and possibly exceeded the Reserve Fund.
57. Most, although not all, overspending in the budget year 2014 can be attributed to the relocation, as well as to costs related to pension and insurance payments in Geneva, and most of them will therefore not continue to occur in the present and future budget years.
58. Budget lines with significant overspending are the following:

Budget line	Budgeted	Actuals
Swiss HR Insurance	EUR 0	EUR 52,644.79
IT	EUR 27,400.00	EUR 55,706.74
Furniture and Equipment	EUR 20,000.00	EUR 39,615.41
Miscellaneous Switzerland	EUR 0	EUR 37,191.56
Insurance	EUR 3.000,00	EUR 6,098.03

59. Swiss Human Resource Insurance: This budget line was opened for Geneva-based staff expenses (Setri Nyomi, Paraic Reamonn, Frans du Plessis) such as pension plan and obligatory health and accident insurances. The amount charged in 2014 for the WCRC's pension plan for Geneva-based staff was higher than expected as a reconciliation was made to include Dora Arce Valentin's share which, due to an oversight by our provider Axa, was not considered in 2013. All the above were cancelled at the end of 2014 as we do not currently have any staff under Swiss contracts.
60. Miscellaneous Switzerland: This budget line includes miscellaneous expenses related to Switzerland that had not been budgeted for initially and could not be allocated otherwise, such as a balance due to WCC for expenses related to the budget year 2013, payment of VAT arrears from previous years and social security charges for Geneva-based staff for 2013 and 2014 that due to a lack of documentation could not be clearly allocated to each staff member. We are in the process of clarification with the help of Antex.
61. Insurance: This is another good example of how Switzerland-related expenses have contributed to our overspending. EUR 5,765.64 of the expenses in this line are for compulsory health and accident insurances for Geneva-based staff, as well as for our offices in the Ecumenical Centre. The staff insurances have been cancelled, and we expect to be able to reduce the office insurance due to the significant reduction in office space in the Ecumenical Centre.

62. Rent: Slight overspending occurred in this budget line as a result of maintaining offices in the Ecumenical Centre. This has now been reduced to one office that creates monthly costs of EUR 450.
63. Adjustment: EUR 15,000.00 were budgeted on the expense side as adjustment, i.e. contingencies in the event of overspending or lower than expected income. Overspending in other lines, however, exceeded this amount by far.
64. Slight overspending was observed in other budget lines, while slight underspending occurred in: Other Professional Fees, Audit Fees, HR Administration, Training, Miscellaneous, Archiving, e.g. No money was spent from the Officers budget because the 2014 officers meeting was combined with the global Accra Confession consultation.
65. Staff costs for General Secretary and Assistants were also significantly lower than expected.
66. **Programme expenses** could be covered through existing funds. Funds need to be raised to continue some programmes as the fund balance have been depleted.
67. The General Secretary Programme and the Youth Programme do not have any funds left. The Youth Programme was put on hold several years ago while the General Secretary Programme was active in 2013.
68. The Native American Project has limited funds and has not been activated since its creation. The Making A Difference Programme was discontinued several years ago. Research is being done to determine if an alternative use can be found or if the funds need to be returned to the donor.
69. The Theological Education Scholarship Fund for women in the global South has funds of over EUR 170,000.00 which need to be used in order to be true to donors. This is on the priority list of the programme staff who will describe the work that has been done in the past year which has not yet had an impact on finances.
70. The funds in the North American Internship Programme will have been used up in their entirety at the end of the current intern's term. The Global Internship Programme requires fundraising if it is to continue beyond 2015. This is being carried out and new alternatives are being explored by me.
71. Partnership Fund A – We are expecting EUR 400,000.00 from Bread for the World (BfW) in 2015. As the funds for the past grant had been spent completely in 2013 nothing was received in 2014. A bridging grant was requested from BftW in 2014 and received in 2015. Separate auditing is carried out by an independent Hannover-based auditor (Curacon). Partnership Fund A has been carrying forward a deficit since 2012. BftW rules state that deficits have to be covered with our own funds. Therefore, a decision was made and carried out to cover this deficit by transferring funds from Partnership Fund E. The Partnership Fund Report continues further details.
72. Partnership Fund B – The only donor for this Fund is currently the Evangelical Church in Westfalia.
73. Partnership Fund C – It was recently brought to the attention of the Finance Office that at least until 2009 we had a Partnership Fund C. Research needs to be done to have clarity on how the funds in this programme were used before it was temporarily discontinued.
74. Partnership Fund D – This Fund is inactive and has a positive balance of EUR 14,176.62.
75. Partnership Fund E – In 2013 and 2014, it was assumed by the Partnership Fund and Finance Office staff that these funds came from the BfW PS Fund A grant to be used for emergency projects when in fact in the past it was replenished with funds originating from PS Fund B to be used for emergency projects. Due to the reallocation of EUR 37,028.66 to cover the deficit in Partnership Fund A, a balance of only EUR 3,705.55 remained. According to our agreement with BfW, starting with the current project, grants for emergency projects will be paid with BfW funds through PS Fund A.

76. EUR 236,959.93 were used from accumulated programme funds to support programmes in 2014.
77. The Finance Committee has affirmed that the standard **programme administration fee** will remain 8% unless the donor specifies otherwise.
78. As per a decision of the Finance Committee from December 2014, 8% of all incoming programme donations were allocated to the core budget as administration fees revenue. To comply with BftW standards, PS Fund A is an exception to this. Here, 15% of all outgoing grants are allocated as programme administration fees revenue.
79. Core income from programme administration fees was down to EUR 18,000 as opposed to EUR 88,000 that had been budgeted for the year. The majority of programming was funded from reserves, not from new money. PS Fund B gave a grant to the GIT and another one to Covenanting for Justice. The incoming donations in those programmes could therefore not be taken into account for programme administration fees as those had already been taken when the funds came in to PS Fund B. The executive secretaries say that the efforts expended on relocating diminished the capacity to do fundraising for programmes.
80. The Finance Committee asked in December 2014 that executive secretaries who oversee programmes submit an outline for their **fundraising plans** for 2015. Concern was also expressed that programme costs and budgets need to correlate. The committee agreed that a unified fundraising system needs to be implemented for programmes, affirming as well the need for tighter projections for budgeting and programme evaluation. It was agreed in the same committee meeting that similar financial controls need to apply to both the Core and the Programme budgets.
81. **Core Budget Income.** Aside from general member church, institutional and individual donations, we received a special UEK donation of EUR 200,000 which was fully allocated to the UEK Special Reserve.
82. There was a considerable decrease in **membership contributions** in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Europe, while an increase can be observed in Latin America, and, although a minor one, in CANAAC.
83. Five percent (5%) of all European membership contributions including the special contributions from the Swiss Cantonal Churches were allocated to WCRC Europe.
84. Seven and a half percent (7.5%) of all membership contributions were allocated to the General Council Reserve.

	2012	2013	2014
Membership Africa	EUR 32,699	EUR 49,292	EUR 35,393
Membership Latin America	EUR 9,827	EUR 4,784	EUR 8,488
Membership CANAAC	EUR 264,598	EUR 228,394	EUR 230,028
Membership Asia	EUR 79,515	EUR 60,770	EUR 53,901
Membership Pacific	EUR 7,618	EUR 12,054	EUR 4,720
Membership Europe (incl. SCC)	EUR 388,055	EUR 487,723	EUR 444,817
TOTAL	EUR 782,312	EUR 843,017	EUR 777,347

85. In 2014, dues letters were only sent out towards the end of the year which could some of the decrease in membership contributions. This year, preparation for sending out dues letters has started in the first quarter and is expected to be almost completed by the time the executive committee meets in May. Follow-up letters will be sent around June. This practice will be used in the future.
86. Some churches have voiced their concern as to the practicability of the grid as they deem the basis of assessment unreasonable in regards to their financial situation or budget structure. While the grid decreased membership fees for some, it more than doubled or tripled them for others (one such example is the Presbyterian Church of Korea).

87. Although the grid is an aspirational goal, past year-end results have not reached the amounts desired. The budget should be based on actual remittances, and this was done for the first time in the 2015 budget. Some regions were budgeted rather carefully, as the 2014 actuals contain significant payments of arrears.

	Budgeted 2014	Actuals 2014	Budgeted 2015
Membership Africa	EUR 57,600	EUR 35,393	EUR 20,000
Membership Latin America	EUR 16,000	EUR 8,488	EUR 3,000
Membership CANAAC	EUR 240,800	EUR 230,028	EUR 222,000
Membership Asia	EUR 142,400	EUR 53,901	EUR 40,000
Membership Pacific	EUR 22,400	EUR 4,720	EUR 2,000
Membership Europe	EUR 528,200	EUR 444,817	EUR 455,000
TOTAL	EUR 1,007,400	EUR 777,347	EUR 742,000

88. We have been unable to reach some member churches. Therefore, we need support from the regions to update the **database**. Werner Joecker has taken on the task of updating the database and looking into the possibility of adding more features, such as creating a fee remittance history and a feature to export invoices.
89. As of December 31, 2014, the WCRC had EUR 75,493.44 as **non-realised exchange rate gains**. In a pre-audit meeting with the auditor it was determined that they could not be booked into the actual budget.
90. The **2014 books were once again audited** by the EKD high audit office. The first part of the audit took place between March 2 and March 16 in the WCRC's Hannover offices. Audited statements as well as an auditor comment are available in both German and English for this executive committee meeting. The audit report has many challenges for us and raises important questions for us bringing our financial management where it should be. Some have already been addressed and others need to be addressed immediately. For example, concerning the audit procedures at least two other funding partners besides BftW have informed us that the EKD ORA audit does not meet their required standards. There are also questions as to whether single entry book keeping is the appropriate system for an organization receiving charitable funds.
91. The **2015 budget** was presented as a draft to the Finance Committee on 22 December 2014. It was then discussed in the subsequent meeting and submitted to the officers and executive committee members for approval via electronic response. At the time of writing of this report, it remained a working budget and should be officially adopted at this executive committee meeting.
92. As previously stated, the budget for membership fees will be based on 2014 receipts, with special contributions (arrears payments) excluded. The European region was rounded up.
93. The standard programme administration fees, with the exception being BftW funds which allow 15% of outgoing grants, will be 8% unless the donor specifies otherwise.
94. **Staff Costs**. Salaries: executive secretary salaries are higher than in 2014 because Phil Tanis was employed for only part of 2014. Support staff salaries are lower but do provide for a fourth full-time assistant. Expat expenses: This includes support of language training for the general secretary, executive secretaries and their families. Home leave for executive secretaries and their families is allowed every two years. The Finance Committee added an extra EUR 2,000 to Executive Secretaries Expat Expense to the proposed budget to cover these costs.
95. The committee reduced the amount budgeted for **contributions** to general council expenses in the proposed 2015 budget from EUR 200,000 to EUR 100,000.

96. It is proposed that the **2016 budget** will be presented later in the year as this allows for more realistic projections. A first draft of the 2016 budget will be presented to the Finance Committee at the end of September/beginning of October 2015. It should then be approved electronically by the officers and subsequently by the executive committee members no later than the beginning of November.
97. **General Council.** Please refer to the planning committee report for more detailed information, as well as a draft budget. Requests were sent to those who made donations for the 2010 Uniting General Council. A bigger push for contributions will be made in 2016 and 2017. The reserve fund for the general council is now EUR 461,871. If all the membership contributions budgeted in 2015 are received we can expect EUR 55,000 from the portion of membership fees (7.5%) to go into the General Council Reserve Fund.
98. In July 2014, all member churches were asked to give the equivalent of one year's membership fee as a special contribution for the general council. As of March 2015, only two churches have pledged to contribute to the general council. The Church of Lippe has agreed to give up to EUR 150,000 and expects to transfer the first rate of EUR 50,000 in 2015. The Church of Scotland has pledged to give three rates of GBP 8,000 each year from 2014 to 2016.
99. **Investments.** In 2014, the WCRC received a substantial donation of EUR 1,211,500 (GBP 1,000,000) from the CWM to be used as to establish an **endowment fund**. These funds were transferred to a designated reserve. In the 2014 Executive Committee meeting in Hannover the general secretary and general treasurer were jointly authorized to invest the WCRC monies. It was decided to reinvest our current assets invested with BNP Paribas and Swiss Life and to invest more than just the CWM grant of GBP 1,000,000.
100. The general treasurer and I, after broad consultation with the assistance of the Finance Office, decided to invest a total of EUR 800,000 in equal parts in two different funds with the German KD-Bank (Bank für Kirche und Diakonie), USD 400,000 with the Barnabas Foundation and USD 400,000 with the Presbyterian Foundation. The authorized amount has been transferred to the KD-Bank and invested in the Fair World Fund and the KCD Sustainability Mix in the first quarter of 2014. The Fair World Fund is an international mixed fund with equities and annuities and sustainability approach. It has a moderate risk. The KCD Sustainability Mix is a global mixed fund with focus on Euro securities and has a moderate risk.
101. Two funds were identified for the USD 800,000 to be invested in the US: the Barnabas Conservative Fund and the Presbyterian Foundation Praxis Intermediate Bond Fund Portfolio. The investment has been delayed as we have encountered difficulties to access and transfer them from the BNP Paribas USD account where they are currently being held. We are in the process of working with our bank to resolve these difficulties as well as to sell and reinvest the current investment we have with them. We have made considerable progress and hope to be able to finalize this second part of our overall investment soon.
102. The WCRC's standards for ethical investment will be met. The general treasurer and I will pursue revising the standards for implementation within two years.
103. The Finance Office would like to point out that concern was raised by the Finance Committee about the low rate of return of low and moderate risk investments. As a result, it was agreed to invest in higher risk stocks than those the Finance Office had initially proposed and feels comfortable with.
104. **Bank Accounts.** The WCRC currently has one main EUR account in Germany with KD-Bank as well as a EUR account with Sparkasse that allows cash withdrawals. We have one main CHF account with PostFinance in Switzerland and one main USD account with 5th3rd Bank in the USA for which Peter Borgdorff is the only signatory. All other accounts require joint signatures. As a general rule, we are working on reducing the number of bank accounts. In this process, we have already closed all our UBS accounts and are working on closing all BNP Paribas accounts after having determined that only a very limited number of member churches use it for the transfer of their contributions. We have a second USD account in Germany and are currently evaluating whether there is in fact a need to keep

it. As a requirement for the Lombard Prize, our Lombard account and investment need to be maintained. Additionally, Bread for the World requires us to keep separate accounts for PS Fund A projects which were opened with KD-Bank.

105. In 2014, the **Finance Committee** met on December 2014 through a Skype meeting. It was agreed that the committee will meet quarterly in order to stay abreast of the financial situation. I have asked for more involvement of the committee in fundraising.

106. **EUR vs CHF – Relocation to Hannover.** The Finance Office deems it essential to point out that were the WCRC's main offices still in Switzerland, due to the depreciation of the euro versus the Swiss franc with the main source of income being outside and the main source of expenses being inside Switzerland, the organization would be broke now. This is very well illustrated by the non-realised currency gains on CHF accounts.



Partnership Fund

107. The Partnership Fund (PS Fund) is a small development fund run by the WCRC. Beneficiaries are member churches and councils of the WCRC mostly located in the global south. In order for an application to benefit from the PS Fund, it has to comply with certain criteria and has to be approved by the Partnership Fund Committee (PSFC). Applications may only be approved for funding every second year provided previous projects have been closed off (this entails financial receipts and reports and a comprehensive final report of the project). Regional Councils may benefit annually, provided previous projects have been closed off. The maximum amount payable is EUR 25,000 and EUR 7,500 for emergency projects.

108. Since 2009 the PS Fund is subordinate to the executive secretary for theology, mission and communion. Up until mid-August 2014 the PF was administered by Viktoria Koczian, assistant to the mentioned department and who took over from Paraic Reamonn earlier that year. Starting that month the responsibilities were passed on to Werner Joecker who joined the WCRC staff in May.

109. 2014 fiscal year:

	EUR
Opening Balance	135,083.06
Income	63,028.66
Expenditure	- 172,033.55
Balance	26,078.17

Supporting documentation is available in the full Partnership Fund report, including details on approved and pending projects.

110. New follow-up grant with BftW: Difficulties related with the transition of the offices from Geneva to Hannover and the fact of having spent the total PS Fund A grant amount in 2013 did not allow us to

maneuver as freely as in the preceding periods. For this purpose the WCRC applied for a bridging Complementary Grant of EUR 50,000 that was approved by October 28th. The funds were released in January 2015. The application for the follow-up grant for the PS Fund A with BftW was made in August 2014 and approved only in December the same year (KED 20146842). The release of the corresponding payments is conditioned on the audit results. It may be noted that for this period and if the variables remain constant the project funds have to be administered in a formal and structured way to prevent the Fund from again depleting before the end of the runtime. For this purpose a proposal for a change in the policies will be submitted (two step project approval process) for the consideration of the PSFC.

111. **Audit.** Starting November 18th a Hannover-based independent auditor, Curacon, was entrusted with examining the (semesters) 1S2013, 2S2013 and 1S2014 for the PS Fund A. The report was presented on March 9th 2015 without observations. Supporting documentation will be available for the meeting. This puts the WCRC in the position to start using the grant.

112. **Budget and planning.** The budget for 2015 will be made in accordance with the Finance Office and following a common structure such as suggested by BftW. Supporting documentation will be available for the meeting.

113. **Future.** Procedural matters and policies need to be adapted to the current circumstances and when non-existent to be created. This includes information policies. In order to replenish the active funds other than A and E and to decrease the dependency from the few current donors, contacts need to be reactivated and new ones established. Especially to give us the capacity in order to react appropriately to all the challenges.

Development and Fundraising

114. The very good news is that we now have in hand the generous and visionary contribution of GBP 1,000,000 from CWM. The investment of this amount is almost complete. This comes in the context of a forward looking partnership agreement and a first step towards creating a larger and more sustainable endowment fund.

115. The WCRC has committed itself to raising up to CHF 9,000,000 over the next six years. The challenge is that the WCRC has not created a vision, strategy or implementation structure for development and fundraising. After the decision to discontinue the development office no new plan was put in place. Moreover, there is no agreement that an endowment fund strategy with such a far-reaching goal is practical or attainable on the global level for the WCRC. Not all regions see endowment funds in a positive light. There is a general feeling that we must undertake a regionally sensitive contextual approach to sustainability, but much work must be done to develop a comprehensive approach that takes seriously the opportunities and commitments related to the CWM gift while integrating specific strategies for each region.

116. The exercise of consulting and deciding on how to invest the CWM contribution demonstrated very different approaches to investment and fundraising within the WCRC. We have to honour the differences but still arrive at a comprehensive and sustainable strategy.

117. The UEK has also very generously given funds over three years that have facilitated the relocation and very importantly allowed us to rebuild the reserve funds.

118. The vision in the strategic plan to concentrate on ensuring funding of the core budget through membership contributions while diversifying other funding approaches should be re-affirmed. The lessons learned last year about the urgent need to attend to the database and getting notices out in a timely way, as well as following closely conversations with those who feel the gird poses real challenges for them will no doubt have a positive impact in 2015-2016. There is also an urgent need to renew our approach to programme funding together with our executive secretaries. To that we add the challenges that always attend raising resources for our general council.

119. In October 2014 I visited the USA and met with member churches and others to get a sense of our readiness to launch a major fundraising campaign in North America. Given the internal transition issues we are still facing and the need to develop a more comprehensive strategy that takes into account both the endowment fund approach and other approaches that might have a better chance to succeed in Asia and Europe, I have recommended that we continue to and strengthen our USA based annual appeal, build on initiatives like the "Geneva Pastors" and work with the Presbyterian Foundation and others for this year while putting in place a comprehensive plan with the full involvement of the executive and the regional councils. The North American trustees play a key role in this with special thanks to Stephen Lytch who serves as president of that group and with the staff support of Phil Tanis.
120. In consultation with the North American trustees and others a report with recommendations has been prepared for discussion during this meeting that should involve close participation from the finance committee, the communications core group, the regional groups and the officers so that we emerge with a plan to develop a strategy that we all feel we can wholeheartedly support. This would include forming a committee and follow up structure that guarantees immediate attention to this urgent need.
121. In the midst of severe financial challenges faced by the WCRC over the last few years there has been a consistent and overwhelming outpouring of concrete support and surprising initiatives. These have been expression of God's grace that once again point us to our mission and purpose. We are not simply struggling to keep an organization on the right track; we responding to God's call, and the bolder and more visionary we are in taking up that mantle of restoring streets to live in and building the unity necessary to do so, guided by God, following Jesus, then the more the resources will come. Chief to our fund development is our own missional renewal. We must be a visible, uniting, ecumenical presence in public witness as we pray towards 2017: "God of Life, Renew and Transform Us." We must quickly put in place a positive constructive plan that excites and inspires each of us to ensure that we have the resources to do as a communion that which God would have us do.

General Council

122. The 26th General Council planning committee held their initial meeting 17-21 November 2014, dividing their time between Hannover and Erfurt. The committee members are Dario Barolin, Doug Chial, Sabine Dressler, Cheryl Meban, Jerry Pillay, Aiko Widhidana Sumichan and Lisa Vander Wal (convener). Cheryl and Jerry were unable to attend the first meeting. Chris Ferguson, Dora Arce-Valentin, Phil Tanis and Claudia Duval were present as staff.
123. The committee reviewed their mandate and addressed key issues in the planning process. Topics included the following: How do we incorporate a sense of "worshipful work" within the meeting? How do we balance the 500th commemoration of the Reformation with the WCRC's work of communion and justice? What outcomes do we hope will arise from the general council? What should be the length of the meeting? How do we balance time for meaningful programme, discernment and outcomes; travel to visit Reformation sites and government venues and time away from home along with budget concerns? How do we ensure that our goals for representation (women, youth, region) are met? What processes are necessary to deal with potentially Communion-dividing issues?
124. The committee had an initial discussion about the overall integrated approach of "worshipful work" and began to explore approaches to the theme and programme with a view to integrating these with the Reformation anniversary focus and the vision of the Accra Confession.
125. The committee discussed the importance of approaching the discernment and decision making process in a new way, following some examples from member churches which use a very participatory bottom-up approach. Rather than working in separate thematic/topical committees or sections the delegates discuss all the primary issues using small group processes. The committee proposes developing these ideas further and presenting them at the 2016 executive committee meeting.

126. The committee considered the length of the meeting and has proposed that meeting be limited to 10 days, not inclusive of pre-councils and travel days. This would mean that offsite travel be limited to two one-day trips—to Wittenberg and to Berlin—rather than many local excursions.
127. Budget principles were discussed and were included in the working budget prepared by a subgroup that will be presented as initial information to officers and the finance committee.
128. There was a recommendation to limit the contract time of the general council coordinator to 18 months.
129. The committee spent considerable time addressing the recommendations concerning venue. See below.
130. Subcommittees were established and will begin to meet in 2015 with another full committee meeting in 2016 at a date to be decided. The minutes of the first meeting are available at this executive.
131. The Reformed Alliance of Germany is fully participating in the planning process and has put in place a local planning committee that coordinates fully with the general council planning committee. In addition there is a staff follow-up group that meets regularly in Hannover.
132. In following up on the recommendations of the planning committee the staff group encountered a series of practical issues concerning the proposed venue at the Erfurt Messe (conference grounds). After extensive consultations and field visits the staff group is proposing modifications to both venue and date.
133. **Venue.** In trying to get more solid figures for the budget we discovered that there were issues with the Erfurt Messe proposal. Their offer to us was not clear on several key points as to what exactly was included and what would require further negotiation or which items needed to be negotiated with other vendors. The process became more frustrating as new figures and deeper clarity were not forthcoming despite repeated requests. Sabine Dressler then reviewed the original proposals from both Erfurt and Leipzig to try to find points of comparison. To our surprise the Leipzig offer was generally less expensive even though the facilities are generally considered superior, and Leipzig has a better track record, including experience with church conventions like Willow Creek and the World Baptist Alliance. Moreover, several of the other negative factors about Leipzig, like distance from town, dispersed hotel rooms and longer transportation times did not seem as pronounced as we had originally assumed.
134. **Hotels.** In Erfurt we discovered that the hotel situation was not as easy as we had been told. Our meeting is in the high tourist season, and the chair of the hotel managers association basically told us they really don't need our business during that period. Therefore, each hotel was willing to give us some space but not as many rooms as we had hoped in each hotel. We would need to be more spread out than we had planned. In addition the prices even for mediocre accommodations seemed high. The hotel prices are better in Leipzig, especially with the new dates (see below).
135. **Transportation.** The distance between Leipzig and the various airports in Germany is less than to Erfurt, and there is also an international airport in Leipzig. The journey times from Leipzig to both Wittenberg and Berlin are much less than from Erfurt.
136. **Church connections.** There is a Reformed Church in Leipzig, and the Lutheran Church there is very keen on us coming, while Erfurt has only a United church (which is not yet a member of the WCRC).
137. **Date.** In negotiating with Leipzig it became clear that we could save even more with a change of date (even when factoring in higher airfares). The new suggested dates are June 27 to July 7. Pre-councils for youth and women would be 27-28 June and 8 July would be a travel day. This modifies the 10+2 proposal of the general council planning committee to 9+2 for budget and time efficiency reasons. The savings in costs could be over EUR 100,000.

138. **Proposal.** It is thus proposed that the venue for the 2017 General Council be Leipzig, Germany, and that the dates be 27 June to 7 July.

139. In conversation with the Reformed Alliance and some United Churches in Germany we are exploring the possibility of having the general council coordinator be provided by one of the United Churches as a fully paid seconded staff. This would, of course, be after a full selection process on our end. This would provide further relief to the budget.

140. A **working budget** has been prepared and the general treasurer has already begun fundraising with the German government.

Internships

141. Since June of last year we have had the excellent participation of two interns, one from South Africa, Fundiswa Kobo, and one from the USA, Jopanna Hipp. Their contributions have been significant and it is evident that this experience over the last three years shows the great contribution such training makes to the wider WCRC family. The funding for the three-year programme ends this year. Every effort is being made to renew the programme. An initial evaluation has begun. After a full review proposals for the future will be shared. There is funding earmarked in the EMW 2015 contribution for internships. New forms of partnering and exchange for internships should be explored as well.

UN Office

142. We are deeply grateful to the PCUSA and to the staff at the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations in New York, Mark Koenig and Ryan Smith, for their work in helping to keep the WCRC informed of global advocacy issues and opportunities. As our vehicle for presence at the UN it would be important to review our relationship and to ensure that we are making best use of this presence, given the vision of our strategic plan. It is clear that we are becoming closer with the office and receiving much help from the ministry, especially in terms of participation in CSW and with our human trafficking programme. Their full report is available.

Global Christian Forum

143. Wes Granberg-Michaelson ably represents us at this important and wide table of global Christianity. The Global Christian Forum (GCF) continues its patient task of building new bonds of ecumenical fellowship with the widest diversity of Christian traditions around the world. In so doing, it enjoys the support and confidence of the World Council of Churches, the World Evangelical Alliance, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, and the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Virtually all the Christian world communions, including the WCRC, also support the GCF.

144. Its major undertakings have been two large global gatherings, the first held in Limuru, Kenya, in 2007, and then in Manado, Indonesia, in 2011. The next of these is planned for 2017 in Latin America. A number of regional meetings, team visits and consultations also undergird its work. In all of its meetings, it has been guided by an intentional commitment to include half of its participants from evangelical, Pentecostal, and other similar Christian communities which have not been previously involved in the formal ecumenical movement. Doing so has successfully brought many new partners into serious ecumenical fellowship.

145. The Manado global gathering encouraged the GCF's governing committee to plan initiatives addressing issues of common global concern to the Forum's broad constituency. After careful consultation with its main partners the GCF agreed to address the challenge of "Discrimination, Persecution, and Martyrdom" being experienced among many parts of the global Christian community. Cries for solidarity have become more urgent, but the separate traditions of world Christianity do not even share a common vocabulary, much less joint strategies and actions in response.

146. Therefore, the GCF will facilitate a global consultation on “Discrimination, Persecution, and Martyrdom,” hosted by the churches in Tirana, Albania, in November 2017. Albania was chosen, with the support of the Orthodox Church there, in light of its past history when the Christian community suffered massive repression and its present reality with a renewed church in a pluralistic context. WCRC President Jerry Pillay will represent us.

Regions and Regional Councils

147. I was able to attend the meeting of WCRC Europe in 2015 in Belfast and was very grateful for that opportunity. The round of consultations marking the 10 years of the Accra Confession gave a good opportunity to stimulate and support the work of AIPRAL, NEACC, ACRC and CANAAC. I will be visiting Indonesia immediately following this executive meeting, and the South Asia region has had a meeting just prior. We have shared in activities and supported solidarity visits with both AIPRAL and Europe. The regional councils have all been active helping contact member churches in times of emergency and in encouraging members to pay their fees.

148. The strategic plan makes it clear that regions are crucial to all that we do. However, we lack a clear, well-resourced and comprehensive plan to empower the regions to better serve the member churches and congregations. Some regions like CANAAC and some member churches have been very clear that they are looking for more support and encouragement from the WCRC. Others function well but feel much more should be done. In my view it is imperative that we make regional empowerment a top priority and seek strategies of working with ecumenical partners like CWM, EMW and member churches with strong regional networks to do so.

Strategic Partners, Networking and Ecumenical Relationships

149. The relationships with our closest partners continue to deepen and widen. We have well-defined common work and shared vision with the Council for World Mission (CWM), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the *Evangelisches Missionswerk* in Germany (EMW) and Bread for the World (BftW).

150. I have made two visits to Singapore to meet with CWM, once with board members and once with staff. Their general secretary participated in our Accra Global gathering while Phil Tanis presented at and participated in their communication consultation. Sudipta Singh visited our offices in Hannover. Our staff people collaborate on common projects, and we continue to identify more and more programmes and initiatives we can undertake together.

151. We are thankful for renewed conversations with LWF and are deeply appreciative of Martin Junge’s presence at this meeting as we look forward to deepening our unity and common action.

152. The EMW relationship is moving ahead with increased partnership, although some funding issues at their end have raised the possibility of less financial support to the WCRC this year rather than the hoped for increase.

153. The collaboration with Bread for the World is strong, and progress is being made to ensure that all necessary improvements are made in the handling of the Partnership Fund.

154. A visit to *Kirk in Actie*/ICCO and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands showed the strength in that partnership.

155. The progress on the NIFEA (New Economic and Financial Architecture) together with LWF, CWM and WCC has not advanced as hoped and as urgently needed. There have been problem in getting the necessary consensus among the four general secretaries as to the joint nature of the programme, such as sharing a common secretariat and articulating priorities. I will continue to make final efforts to see if a common ecumenical effort is possible before proposing an alternative approach.

156. As a key part in making visible our full participation and contribution as a Communion in ecumenical witness for justice and peace I have agreed to serve as co-rapporteur on the reference group for the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The first meeting was held in February 2015 in Bossey, Switzerland. Mobilizing our Communion to participate fully in this should be a focus for the next year leading up to our 2017 General Council and could well be an emphasis emerging from that meeting.
157. We continue to relate to the annual meeting of general secretaries of Christian world communions. Our next meeting will be in London later this year.
158. We continue to seek ways of forming a strategic partnership with the World Student Christian Federation, including relating to their strong regional networks. The WSCF offers us a new way of emphasizing partnership with ecumenical youth and student organizations. I attended the WSCF assembly in Bogota, Colombia, in February 2015. Many global ecumenical organizations find themselves living through crises of sustainability and leadership. The WSCF has been one of those. As part of our emphasis on ecumenical solidarity I have been accompanying the WSCF in its transformation and transition process.
159. Another important ecumenical organization that has been going through a significant organizational crisis is the CLAI (Latin American Council of Churches). In close consultation with AIPRAL I formed part of an ecumenical accompaniment team to help support CLAI (along with the WCC, ACT Alliance, United Methodist Church and others).
160. We hope to explore new partnerships with the World Association of Christian Communicators (WACC), who we are pleased to report are present at this meeting and interested in seeing how we can work more closely together.
161. We have taken first steps to strengthen our relationship with the EKD. Douwe Visser attended their most recent assembly and we are especially pleased with the appointment of Susanne Erlecke as our liaison. We are delighted she has been able to attend our meeting.
162. I have had meetings with EMS and UEM to see how to develop even more active partnerships with these two German-based international mission groups.
163. We are extremely grateful for the ongoing support of the UEK and continue to look for ways to draw closer to the United Churches in Germany. We will continue to explore with them possible interest in some United Churches joining the WCRC in the future. These explorations have included the question if the WCRC would consider a name change to reflect the important place of United and Uniting churches in our Communion.
164. I attended the recent assembly of the Reformed Alliance in Germany. They elected a new moderator, Martin Engels, and installed Achim Detmers as general secretary. They paid homage to the significant leadership of our own Peter Bukowski, who retired after serving as the moderator for 25 years! This was also the opportunity to celebrate the ministry of Jörg Schmidt, who, with over 30 years of service, was general secretary during the last eight. Along with Peter, Jörg played a very special role in encouraging and facilitating our move to Hannover. We give great thanks to God for the generous hospitality and excellent collaboration that we enjoy with the Reformed Alliance. I must include a special mention to the ongoing support of Sabine Dressler in many things but particularly in general council planning.
165. We have enjoyed visits to our offices in Hannover from members and ecumenical partners such as the regional Lutheran bishop of Hannover. Please check us out on Facebook, where we post many of these visits.

Visits to members

166. I have considered it extremely important and a high priority to be present and visible and to make early visits to as many regions as possible and to make our interest and involvement in the lives of our member churches known.
167. I participated in the AIPRAL Accra Confession consultation. I have also visited the leadership and local congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia twice in order to support them in their work with communities at risk and in the peace process in that country. I also participated in an international, ecumenical peace conference for Colombia together with AIPRAL at the invitation of CLAI.
168. At the request of our president I participated with Jerry Pillay in a conflict transformation effort with a member church in Democratic Republic of Congo.
169. At the request of two member churches in Scotland I have accompanied talks between them upon the dissolution of a covenant over issues of human sexuality.
170. I was the keynote speaker at the anniversary celebrations of the National Council of Churches of India and visited the offices and diaconal and mission work of both the Church of South India and the Church of North India.
171. I had two opportunities to visit with leadership and participate in assemblies of the RCA and CRCNA in the context of their new found unity after 157 years of separation. I visited the offices of the United Church of Christ and the PC(USA) in the United States and the UCC Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada. All of these were very inspiring and energetic visits.
172. In the Middle East I participated in a meeting in Cairo to explore with our member churches and others the challenges they face. I visited our member churches in Lebanon and was a keynote speaker at an ecumenical event in Bethlehem.
173. I traveled to Berne, Switzerland, to visit with leadership of the Swiss Protestant Federation.
174. The work of communion building and unity in justice is demanding and challenging, but above all it is inspiring as our churches show courage, wisdom and faithfulness in facing a broken and hurting world.

Concluding Remarks

175. It is clear that through all the transition and troubles, struggles and possibilities there are so many churches in our family that support the Communion in prayer and action. There is, in fact, in the ecumenical world and among our members high expectations for us. There is a constant call for us to bring fully our special gifts as a WCRC family.
176. A special thanks to all who have so graciously supported Susan and me this year. Through some of the difficult moments I have come to value the support and solidarity of Jerry Pillay in a very special way. Thanks to the officers and all who have upheld us in your prayers and offered help.
177. Things have not always been easy or smooth within the staff team but I want to give thanks to God for each and every person, for all have been dedicated and shared their gifts and passions. To Anna, Werner, Claudia, Viktoria, Phil, Douwe, Dora, Gerhard and Paul—and a very special thanks to our interns Joanna and Fundiswa.
178. The time is here and the opportunity great to hear to embrace the call to move on from transition and take up again the full extent of the call to be repairers of the breach and restorers of streets to live in.
179. Thank you.