



*"The light will remain burning in all locations": WCRC President Jerry Pillay and Vice-Presidents Lu Yueh Wen and Bas Plaisier.
Photo: Stephen Brown*

WCRC gives thanks for 65 years in Geneva

At a service in the chapel of the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) marked the more than six decades in which the Reformed church family has been based in the Swiss city. In January 2014, WCRC's operating office moves to Hannover, Germany.

"We gather here to join our hearts in thanksgiving for 65 years of God's presence," said WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi. He recalled that the Presbyterian World Alliance, a forerunner of WCRC, moved from Edinburgh to Geneva in 1948 to be near to the newly-founded World Council of Churches (WCC).

The service on 5 December was attended by WCRC President Jerry Pillay and officers, current and former staff, representatives of Swiss and German churches, and sister organizations in the Ecumenical Centre, as well as the German Ambassador to Switzerland, Otto Lampe.

"We certainly thank God for the fact that ... we could be physically part of a wider ecumenical family," said the WCRC's Executive Secretary for Theology and Communion, Douwe Visser, in his sermon. Above all, however, the period in Geneva, he said, was a time of being able to receive God's word. "Looking at our 65 years of being with you here in Geneva from the perspective of God's word given to us, we see so much to thank God for."

The President of the Protestant Church of Geneva, Charlotte Kuffer, also bringing greetings from the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, said her church had been profoundly marked by WCRC and its predecessors. Thanking these churches for their support, Setri Nyomi said they would remain "custodians of the Reformed tradition that binds us together".

Yorgo Lemopoulos, WCC Deputy General Secretary, and Kaisamari Hintikka, Assistant General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, promised that their organizations would continue to remain linked with the WCRC.

In his message, Jerry Pillay described the time in Geneva as a significant chapter in the WCRC's life, and the move to Germany as a new chapter. "The chapters may be written in different places," he said, "but it is the same book and the same story."

A candle was lit by Pillay and WCRC Vice-Presidents Lu Yueh Wen and Bas Plaisier to mark the departure from Geneva. It was then passed to representatives of sister organizations, the Geneva church, and the German churches, including WCRC General Treasurer Johann Weusmann. He shared the flame with worshippers, who placed candles at the front of the chapel. "The light will remain burning in all locations," said Nyomi.

Pastors' gathering explores Reformed tradition, WCRC's role



By Rob Bullock

Eleven pastors from six denominations gathered in Geneva in August to explore the future of the Reformed movement, and the role of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in that movement. The five-day gathering, sponsored by WCRC and the Presbyterian Foundation, placed particular emphasis on ways WCRC can connect with and serve congregations.

The gathering included visits to Reformation sites, daily worship, meetings with leaders of WCRC, the World Council of Churches and the Protestant Church of Geneva, and discussion about how congregational mission and ministry are related to global theological and justice work.

“I was glad for the conversations with pastors from various places with shared faith, diverse opinions, and common desires to see the Reformed faith and its churches flourish and be strong witnesses for Christ,” said Jerry Andrews, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in San Diego, California.

WCRC, in its strategic plan, has placed particular emphasis on relating to local congregations. The group identified several areas of need among congregations and ways the World Communion could help address them:

- To *capture stories* of the Reformed tradition in its work today and provide means of distributing them by creating and utilizing more and better channels of communication;
- To focus more on *relationships* – less on institutions. This includes helping Reformed Christians learn to be peers with each other, serving as a bridge-builder for congregations seeking relationship, working for reconciliation amongst divided bodies, and providing a safe space for difficult discussions and shared theological exploration;
- To continue to *engage various groups* such as young theologians, more experienced pastors, and

laypeople and to develop networks built around shared expertise and/or ministry passions;

- To *strengthen the Reformed identity* by developing a significant voice in the culture to proclaim and celebrate core Reformed beliefs, providing help and encouragement for the missionary vocation of evangelism, and doing work with obvious and repeated references to the Saviour – why we do what we do.

“WCRC is a body that is able to do an enormous amount of work that we as congregations on the ground cannot do,” said Martin (Chunky) Young, pastor of St Columba’s Presbyterian Church in Johannesburg, South Africa. “They have enabled me to engage my prayers with people’s faces and to know that because of the work they do, justice and reconciliation has a real chance.”

The Presbyterian Foundation sponsored the gathering as part of its efforts to bring more Presbyterians together in support of shared ministry causes.

“The conversations at this gathering were substantial and important for the future of the Reformed Tradition,” said Tom Taylor, President and CEO of the Foundation. “Bringing together these pastors and World Communion leaders could begin to shape what our tradition will look like in the future.”

Participants represented Reformed denominations in North America and Southern Africa: the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the United Christian Churches of Canada, ECO: a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, and the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa.

Rob Bullock is Vice-President for Marketing and Communication of the Presbyterian Foundation

New panel starts work on reform of financial system

A newly established ecumenical panel of economic experts has begun work on proposals to promote ethical, just and sustainable systems of economics and finance.

The Ecumenical Panel on a New Financial and Economic Architecture was created by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Council for World Mission (CWM) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

The panel is intended to take forward the work of the Commission of Experts on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System, chaired by Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate in economics and professor at Columbia University in New York.

The first meeting of the ecumenical panel took place in August at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, near Geneva, Switzerland.

“Suffering as a result of the economic injustice inherent in the current architecture is increasing,” WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi told the meeting. “Both faith-based analysis and analysis in secular institutions point to the fact that the way the global economy is arranged is largely responsible for this injustice.”

He urged the panel to “develop meaningful prophetic conversations with the economic powers of our days aimed at life-giving transformation”, and tools and campaigns that churches in every context can use to challenge their own economic systems that are part of the injustice of the current economic architecture.

The creation of the panel was one of the recommendations of a global conference on the international financial and economic system, organized by WCRC, the WCC and CWM near the Brazilian city of São Paulo in September-October 2012. In a concluding document, titled *São Paulo Statement: International Financial Transformation for the Economy of Life*, the conference described social inclusion, gender justice, care for the environment, and actions to overcome greed as criteria for the new economic and financial architecture.

Barry Herman, one of the members of the panel and a visiting senior fellow at the Graduate Program in International Affairs of The New School in New York City, referred to the need

for a financial transaction tax, to translate the spirit of the São Paulo statement into action.

While some countries have introduced a tax on financial transactions and raised considerable financial resources, “campaigns are needed to increase tax payments by tax evaders, who are overwhelmingly big companies and the more affluent segments of society,” said Herman.

“Tax evasion is not a crime against a faceless bureaucracy. It is a crime against the citizens who pay more taxes as a result of the non-payment by others and receive fewer and poorer quality public services as a consequence,” he stated.

Nora Castañeda, the first president of the Women’s Development Bank in Venezuela, appointed by the late president Hugo Chavez, highlighted the importance of gender aspects in efforts for a just economy.



Nora Castañeda, Venezuelan participant in the ecumenical panel on a new financial and economic architecture in Bossey, Switzerland. Photo: WCC/Naveen Qayyum

“Women often live at the front of the poverty line. To address economic injustices, it is important to incorporate gender perspectives, a principle also outlined in the São Paulo statement,” said Castañeda.

Projects that address the needs of women have a lasting impact on Venezuelan society, where a majority of families living in poor conditions are headed by women, she said. (WCRC/WCC)

Heidelberg Catechism continues to inspire after 450 years

Reformed churches in different parts of the world have marked the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism, one of the most widely circulated statements of faith in Reformed Protestantism.

The catechism was approved by the Synod of Heidelberg in 1563 and took the form of a series of questions and answers about the Christian faith. It was composed at the request of Elector Frederick III, who wanted, among other things, a catechism that could help to bring unity to several Protestant factions in his territory of the Electoral Palatinate, one of the states that made up the 16th-century Holy Roman (German) Empire.

The Heidelberg Catechism was quickly translated from German and Latin into Dutch, English, Hungarian, French, Greek, Romansch, Czech and Spanish. It now also exists in many African and Asian languages.

In Heidelberg, the catechism was the focus at the general assembly in June of the Reformed Alliance, an

umbrella for about one and a half million Reformed Christians in Germany. In a keynote address, Petra

Bosse-Huber, then Vice-President of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, underlined that the catechism is not the property of the Reformed alone.

The Heidelberg Catechism, she said, describes new life in Jesus Christ not only in terms of individual salvation but looks to the wider community “of all God’s creation”.

In the United States, to mark the anniversary, a new translation of the Heidelberg Catechism has been undertaken by three churches: the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In South Africa, Stellenbosch University hosted an international conference about the 16th-century origins and context of this document, as well as its theological and social significance, its historical reception and its contemporary relevance.



Heidelberg and Accra

Heidelberg is an expression of faith initiated in Europe in a particular and tumultuous historical, political and religious reality, while the Accra Confession began as the result of African, Asian and Latin American Christians wanting to respond to the unjust economic reality and the ecological disaster their countries were facing and to do this from a faith perspective.

Now both of these documents speak to the world. Heidelberg is the result of Frederick III wanting to have a common expression of the Reformed Faith that could be taught and explain the basics of faith; it was born at a time of controversy, and was in itself controversial ... The Accra Confession is likewise the result of struggle, beginning in Kitwe in 1995, and supported by the Reformed family meeting in Debrecen in 1997 ...

Until we can take the theology of our historic documents that set out the faith that sustained us in the past and make it alive, real and relevant to the new world situation, we will find it very hard to overcome the tensions and it will not help us to build a world that is more just, more equal, more life-

enhancing for the millions and millions that continue to be ejected from the possibility of living a full and meaningful life just as God has set out for all people, and not for some few.

Robert H. Jordan, from Passing on the Faith: Heidelberg Catechism 1563-2013.

Passing on the Faith: Heidelberg Catechism 1563-2013

To mark the anniversary of the catechism, WCRC has published a booklet with information on the catechism’s historical and theological background, as well as worship, service and Bible study material, an article relating the Heidelberg Catechism to WCRC’s Accra Confession, and articles about “signs of hope” by students who attended WCRC’s Global Institute of Theology in 2012.

Download from: wrc.ch/reformation-sunday-material/

WCRC leaders praise progress to unity among Reformed churches in South Africa



The President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Jerry Pillay, has welcomed progress in the past two years by churches of the Reformed family in South Africa to overcome major hurdles on the path to unity.

“We give thanks to God,” Pillay said at the end of a visit to South Africa by the WCRC South Africa task team from 29 September to 2 October.

The team led by Pillay also included WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi, Sabine Dressler of the Reformed Alliance in Germany and Oscar McCloud of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The team had meetings with the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA). These four churches have been engaged in reunification talks for more than a decade. The team said they felt encouraged about what they heard from the four churches. Challenges that had created mistrust and stalled the process seemed to be dissipating.

The South African churches informed the visiting team that the URCSA and NGK had signed a memorandum of agreement in April 2013 which outlines the way forward and takes full account of restorative justice, reconciliation and the Belhar Confession, a statement of faith written by South African Christians as a response to apartheid. The leaders of both churches acknowledged the mediation work carried out by Pillay over the last four years as crucial for the breakthroughs that have been achieved.

In the presence of the WCRC team, the URCSA and NGK reassured the RCA and DRCA of their commitment to journey together with them in a spirit of respect and sensitivity.

Commenting on the meetings, Sabine Dressler of Germany said, “Although there are still some points of challenge and difficulty between URCSA and the NGK, I am encouraged by their enthusiasm in the decision to go ahead with unification.”

The WCRC team also held discussions with the leadership of the *Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk van Afrika* (NHKA). This is the church that remains suspended from the WCRC for its stance in the apartheid era. The moderator of the NHKA, Wim Dreyer, informed the team about recent decisions of his church.

It was clear that although the church has been through many painful challenges including the departure of about 13 congregations, the NHKA has taken most of the key decisions needed to open the doors towards readmission to the WCRC. The decision of readmission itself can only be taken by the WCRC’s Executive Committee. According to Oscar McCloud, “The NHKA has come a long way, and they are struggling with pain in the process of doing the right thing. On condition that they continue on this path, a recommendation for their readmission into the WCRC would be helpful.”

WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi described both processes as signs of the movement of the Holy Spirit, saying, “We will continue to journey with our sisters and brothers in South Africa.”

Brazilian website documents human rights work of Presbyterian pastor



Sonia Wright, daughter of Jaime Wright, was invited by the coordinators of the project to launch the website of "Brasil: Nunca Mais Digital". Photo: Marcelo Schneider/WCC

Digital versions of hundreds of records documenting human rights abuses under Brazil's former military dictatorship that were smuggled out of the country through the work of a Presbyterian pastor are now available online for public consultation.

A new website, *Brasil: Nunca Mais Digital* (*Brazil: Never Again Digital*) (<http://bnmdigital.mpf.mp.br>), provides free access to more than 900,000 pages of official documents relating to torture and human rights abuses.

The website was officially launched in August with a click by Sonia Wright, the daughter of Jaime Wright, the Presbyterian pastor who worked with lawyers to smuggle the records out of Brazil. He died in 1999.

Jaime Wright's brother, a political activist, "disappeared" in the early 1970s at the hands of the military government which ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985.

Working closely with Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sao Paulo, Jaime Wright cooperated with lawyers who had discovered that it was possible to consult records of the supreme military courts. They made secret copies of more than 700 cases. The documents were then secretly

sent to the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, Switzerland, and the Center of Research Libraries (CRL) in Chicago, USA, for safe keeping.

Charles Harper, a WCC staff member and Presbyterian pastor with dual Brazilian and United States citizenship, created a clandestine collection of the court records in the WCC Archives.

After Brazil returned to civilian rule in 1985, the documents became the basis of a book, *Brasil: Nunca Mais*, supported by the WCC and the Sao Paulo archdiocese.

In June 2011, WCC General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit personally brought the original files from the WCC Archives to Brazil and entrusted them to the Brazilian attorney general.

Regional prosecutor Marlon Weichert worked closely with the WCC and CRL in arranging the repatriation of the records, which include evidence that had gone missing from files held by the Supreme Military Court of Brazil.

"We celebrate the creation of the website, but we also honour the victims and survivors and we reflect about the power of information and the truth," said Weichert. (*WCRC/WCC*)

On the path to justice and peace

WCRC at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches

More than 3000 participants gathered at the end of October in the South Korean city of Busan for the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, among them many members of Reformed, Presbyterian and United churches.

Under the theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”, the assembly, which ran from 30 October to 8 November, issued a call to all people of good will to join a pilgrimage to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions.

“We live in a time of global crises. Economic, ecological, socio-political and spiritual challenges confront us,” delegates said in their concluding message. “Listening to voices that often come from the margins, let us all share lessons of hope and perseverance. Let us recommit ourselves to work for liberation and to act in solidarity.”

As a sign of the commitment of the WCRC to the ecumenical movement, WCRC officers participated in the assembly, where they held their 2013 autumn meeting. In addition to receiving and acting on the report of the WCRC General Secretary from May to October 2013, the officers deliberated on how to strengthen the relations between the WCC and the WCRC especially in view of the assembly theme.

The officers also held a session with the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, Martin Junge, and the LWF Assistant General Secretary for ecumenical relations, Kaisamari Hintikka, looking at ways in which the two organizations can work together even closer.

Of the 30 members of the WCRC Executive Committee, 14 participated in the WCC Assembly, giving an opportunity to gather participants from WCRC member churches. At the meeting, WCRC President Jerry Pillay and General Secretary Setri Nyomi outlined recent developments in the life of the Reformed fellowship.

Dora Arce-Valentín, WCRC Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, described how 2014 would mark the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession. This states that matters of economic and ecological justice are not only social, political and moral issues, but are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church.

Douwe Visser, WCRC Executive Secretary for Theology and Communion, outlined plans for the fourth Global Institute of Theology, which is to bring together 35 young theologians and pastors in Costa Rica in July 2014.



Photo: Peter Williams/WCC

Changing ecumenical landscape needs new perspectives for unity and justice

By Jane Stranz

Changes in global Christianity mean that confessional and ecumenical bodies need to find new ways of cooperating between themselves and to advance justice in the world, WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi said in a presentation at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan.

“We need new forms of cooperation between Christian World Communions and the WCC,” Nyomi told one of the assembly’s 21 “ecumenical conversations”. The insights of bilateral dialogues between confessional bodies need to be brought into emerging multilateral relationships, he said. At the same time, the justice agenda needs to be advanced, Nyomi underlined in his presentation to the ecumenical conversation on the theme “Called to be One: New Ecumenical Landscapes”.

Over four days, participants examined issues such as the changing geographical distribution of Christianity, how young people seek authenticity in church organizations, and how migration is challenging fixed boundaries of concepts and institutions.

“The call is to be prophetic in our time, but there is not enough cooperation,” said Nyomi, pointing to issues such as gender justice, sexual violence, migration, and human trafficking.

As one example of cooperation, Nyomi described the work of the WCRC, WCC, Council for World Mission and Lutheran World Federation in developing proposals for a new global financial architecture.

Nyomi was a facilitator for the ecumenical conversation, which was chaired by Archbishop Nareg Alemezian, Ecumenical Officer of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Holy See of Cilicia, from Lebanon.

The group heard that factors in the emergence of new ecumenical realities include the growth of Pentecostal, charismatic, neo-charismatic and non-denominational churches and the impact of globalization on different societies.

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, former general secretary of the Reformed Church of America, and a member of the Global Christian Forum committee, questioned the language of ecumenism: it is not about “us” offering ecumenical space to others but how we are able to be changed and challenged by other ways of doing things.

Jane Stranz is Ecumenical Officer of the Protestant Federation of France



Archbishop Nareg Alemezian and Setri Nyomi. Photo: Jane Stranz

‘May God lead us to work for justice and peace’

We celebrate the 10th Assembly. We thank God for the gathering of the church in Busan in all its diversity and its gifts and commitment towards unity. That gathering itself is a miracle for which we need to give thanks to God. I am glad that during the plenary on justice, one of the speakers made reference on the impact and inspiration of the São Paulo declaration which called for reform of the international financial and economic architecture. It was good to know that this initiative of the WCRC into which we have invited the WCC, the Council for World Mission and the Lutheran World Federation is felt as important. I left Busan with two questions. In what ways has the theme and the events that took place in Busan

inspired delegates and other participants to go back to their own contexts fired up to be more committed to and working for justice and peace. My second question is how will the WCC programmes reflect a renewed commitment to justice and peace and practical ways of facilitating how the member churches and ecumenical partners follow up on these issues. The theme, “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”, is so critical for our days. In the coming year, we will be watching carefully and accompanying the process with the hopes that many more have been led to work for justice and peace.

Setri Nyomi

Celebrating the Lord's Supper in Busan

As an initiative of the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (DECC), the Disciples of Christ and Reformed organized a celebration of the Lord's Supper on 5 November in the WCC Assembly space for prayers.

In her message to those who were at the communion service, Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the USA recalled the gift and challenge of Christian unity. Robert Welsh, General Secretary of the DECC gave thanks to God for making it possible for this celebration to take place in the context of the WCC Assembly. Other leaders of the Eucharistic service were Setri Nyomi, WCRC General Secretary, Geoffrey Black, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ in the USA and Sarah Lund, a minister of the United Church of Christ.

After the celebration of Eucharist, Setri Nyomi commented: "It was very meaningful to share in the Eucharist and to welcome all to the table when we knew painfully that celebration is not possible for the whole Assembly. Among other traditions, the



Photo: Karen Georgia Thompson

Disciples and Reformed look forward to the day when all divisions will be overcome and when all can share together at the table to which the Lord has invited."

Costa Rica to host Global Institute of Theology 2014

The fourth Global Institute of Theology (GIT) is set to take place in San Jose, Costa Rica, 5-28 July 2014. The institute will be held in collaboration with and under the academic auspices of the Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana (Latin American Biblical University).

stories and participation in the life of the churches in Costa Rica, the Institute participants will explore the theme of "Transforming Mission, Community, and Church". Students will take part in a core course as well as two elective courses out of six possible choices.

"The ultimate goal ... is to form a new generation of Reformed leaders who are fully aware of the faith dimension of contemporary challenges, including economic injustice and environmental destruction," said Douwe Visser, WCRC Executive Secretary for Theology and Communion, and secretary of the Institute.

The Institute's faculty will include, among others, Bas Plaisier (The Netherlands), Peter Wyatt (Canada), Aruna Gnanadason (India), Isabel Phiri (Malawi), Claudio Carvalhaes (United States), Philip Peacock (India), Hans de Wit (The Netherlands), and Roy May (United States).

Further information can be obtained on the WCRC website wrc.ch, the GIT website (www.globalinstituteoftheology.org) or via e-mail to aws@wrc.ch



The Institute is a programme organized every two years by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Previously, it has been held in Ghana, the United States, and Indonesia. The programme is intended for theological students and pastors beginning their ministry. Up to 35 participants will be selected in 2014. Applicants should have a particular interest in ecumenical theology and mission.

Through lectures, seminars, worship services, exposure visits, contextual experiences, the sharing of

New WCRC website – soon in eight languages

The “renewed and transformed” World Communion of Reformed Churches now has a new website. The new site www.warc.ch includes news, the WCRC blog, information, details of how to support WCRC projects and more. With a clean, contemporary design, the new website is more easily accessible on smartphones, tablets and other devices. The website is initially available in English, French, German and Spanish, with Arabic, Chinese, Korean and Indonesian sites planned for January 2014.

“We will continue to expand the content so that we can offer an increasingly deeper understanding of the vision and the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches,” the WCRC General Secretary, Setri Nyomi, said in a letter to member churches announcing the new website.

Offers of financial support for WCRC are gratefully accepted – and can be made by way of the website’s donations page: www.warc.ch/donate/

The new website has been made possible by the generous support of the *Fondation pour l'aide au protestantisme réformé* (FAP). Feedback on the new website can be sent to warc@warc.ch



Online theology library to offer WCRC resources

Publications and resources from the World Communion of Reformed Churches will soon be available in an online library on theology and ecumenism.

The Global Digital Library on Theology and Ecumenism (GlobeTheoLib) aims to redress a global imbalance of access to research materials in theology and related disciplines.

GlobeTheoLib contains more than 750,000 articles, documents and other academic resources that can be accessed online free-of-charge by registered participants from anywhere in the world via the internet (www.globethics.net/gtl).

GlobeTheoLib

Access to GlobeTheoLib is via a multilingual portal in six languages – English, French, German, Spanish, Indonesian and Chinese.

GlobeTheoLib was launched in September 2011 as a joint project of the World Council of Churches and Globethics.net, a Geneva-headquartered foundation promoting global dialogue on ethical issues.

The project is supported by a consortium that includes associations of theological libraries and seminaries, as well as mission organizations, foundations, Regional Ecumenical Organizations, and Christian World Communions, including WCRC.

ENI ceases operations

Ecumenical News International (ENI) has ceased operations after the failure of attempts to find new sources of funding. ENI was founded in 1994 by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation and Conference of European Churches as an ecumenical news agency providing a daily news service to

secular and church media. The WCRC General Secretary, Setri Nyomi said, “WCRC is glad to have been among the founders and we celebrate its impact while it was in operation. We had been committed to the continuation of ENI and regret that it has not been possible to keep ENI in operation.”

Churches help relief effort, in midst of Syria violence

Amid continuing conflict in Syria, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon is providing relief and support to families affected by the crisis and to people who have been internally displaced.

“As the violence rages day by day and loss of life is but a continuous story, and destruction includes personal and common properties, the need for relief is greater,” the synod’s General Secretary, the Rev. Fadi Dagher, said in a letter to partners in October.

Presbyterian churches in Aleppo and Homs have been attacked and damaged. “Although our Presbyterian church building was bombed, our Presbyterian church human body is still insisting on existence to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of the crisis,” said the Rev. Ibrahim Nsier, pastor of Aleppo Arabic-speaking Evangelical Church, in a report about the NESSL’s relief efforts.

The synod has helped more than 500 displaced and affected families in Homs, Ghassanieh and Aleppo through monthly cash support.

A new synod relief programme was launched in August, led by the Rev. Salam Hanna, Director of relief and rehabilitation at the NESSL. It has provided impartial assistance to more than 2250 families from different backgrounds. In a report from October, Hanna said that people need help with rent, medication, winter fuel and clothes, as well



The damaged building of the Presbyterian church of Aleppo. Photo: NESSL

as psychological care and spiritual support, which is being offered by many pastors and churches.

The programme is being implemented by 12 local Presbyterian churches. Relief coordination was initially hampered by communication difficulties due to a lack of internet, telephone and mobile phone links.

In the old city of Homs, more than 70,000 Christians have fled the Christian quarter, the NESSL reported. Many houses and buildings were destroyed or damaged including the city’s Presbyterian church.



A displaced farmer receiving food assistance through vouchers provided by the NESSL. He and his family are originally from a Christian village named Jdaideh in a suburb of Edl. “The 400 village inhabitants were displaced 10 months ago. The opposition fighters entered the Christian village in December 2012, and told the inhabitants that they are coming to ‘liberate’ the village from the ruling regime,” the farmer said, as reported by the NESSL. “Inhabitants stayed for a month in their village until one of the Islamic radical armed groups came to the village and started persecuting people in various ways. They arrested many innocent villagers accusing them of being regime allies. Many inhabitants were terrified and tortured by that group, so that all of the village’s inhabitants had to flee with what they were wearing, leaving behind them everything they owned: land, properties, houses, furniture.”

Photo: NESSL

WCRC will remain linked to Swiss churches

The General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Setri Nyomi, has paid tribute to the Protestant churches in Switzerland for their continuing support to the WCRC.

“You have given us leadership, your theologians have contributed and continue to contribute,” Nyomi told the conference of the presidents of the Swiss Protestant churches in Berne on 25 October.

The Reformed church movement has been located since 1948 in Geneva, known for its role in the Protestant Reformation led by John Calvin. In 2014, for financial reasons, the WCRC is transferring its secretariat to Hannover, Germany. Nyomi underlined the role of the Swiss churches as the custodians of Reformed heritage, with the Reformed family tracing its theological and historical heritage through the Reformation led by Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, Marie Dentière and others.

“Therefore, wherever we are located and in all our 227 member churches worldwide in 108 countries, we will always trace our heritage to you. For this we are linked in a way that nothing can change,” the WCRC General Secretary underlined.

Nyomi said that it was “with a deep sense of pain that we had to leave our cradle”, because of the financial challenges of operating in Switzerland. He said the WCRC would do everything possible to maintain the links with the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (FEPS) and the individual cantonal churches. “The WCRC will remain your family and we need your continued prayer and your support,” Nyomi stated. “We ask you to pray for us in this period of transition.”

The President of the Council of the FEPS, Gottfried Locher, thanked Setri Nyomi for his



Setri Nyomi with Gottfried Locher, President of the Council of the FEPS. Photo: FEPS/Bienz

services to the WCRC as General Secretary and stated his appreciation for the work done by WCRC for the Reformed family worldwide. Other Presidents of the Swiss cantonal churches reaffirmed their commitment to the work of the WCRC.

During the meeting, Nyomi welcomed efforts to strengthen the identity of Protestantism in Switzerland. Constitutional changes being considered by the members of FEPS would give the church federation a new name – the Protestant Church in Switzerland. If agreed, the new constitution will come into force in January 2016. “We will continue to pray with and accompany you,” said Nyomi.

‘Africa needs visionary leaders’

Churches and Christian communities need to be at the forefront of empowering leadership that contributes to transforming African communities, the third African Forum for Religion and Government has heard.

Speaking at the forum, held in Lusaka, Zambia from 24 to 27 September, Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, said that the church needed to have the “credibility to be prophetic in its actions that lead to life-giving change”.

The forums are organised by the International Leadership Foundation under the leadership of its President, Dela Adadevoh. Participants include church leaders as well as government and business leaders from all over Africa. The theme of the Lusaka meeting was “Empowering leaders for transforming Africa”.

Nyomi identified several areas where the church needs to get its own house in order and to contribute to societal transformation: remaining focused on its mission and calling; being prophetic; fostering justice, peace and reconciliation; promoting accountable leadership; nurturing a new generation; and supporting the conduct of free, fair and transparent elections.

“For the church to be faithful agents of transformation, it needs to first practise excellence in each of these areas in its own operations,” the WCRC leader said.

Nyomi called on African Christians to be at the forefront of fostering justice by tackling unjust economic systems, corruption, and oppression by people on account of race, tribe, gender, economic status. “If we as Christian leaders do not speak out against these, who will?”

'We will speak out'

Churches worldwide were invited to join *Speak Out Sunday* on 24 November to promote dialogue, teaching, prayer and action about sexual- and gender-based violence and its prevention.

The day was organized by *We Will Speak Out*, a global coalition of Christian-based NGOs and church organisations, including the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Speak Out Sunday marked the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, observed from 25 November (United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December, the International day for Human Rights.

"Violence against women is not only crime, it is a sin," said Dora Arce-Valentín, WCRC Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, and a member of the *We Will Speak Out* Steering Committee.

A report released in June by the World Health Organization highlighted physical or sexual violence as a public health problem that affects more than

one third of all women globally. The report, the first systematic study of global data on the prevalence of violence against women, found that intimate partner violence is the most common type of violence against women, affecting 30 percent of women worldwide.

We Will Speak Out aims to harness efforts to end sexual violence by supporting churches to speak out against sexual violence, show strong and positive leadership and become safe places for people to go to. It works to influence legislation and policies with a united voice.

Individuals are invited to sign an online pledge committing themselves to speaking out against and responding to sexual violence.

The campaign says churches have a mandate to care for and stand with people who are marginalized and vulnerable. Shame and fear often lead to sexual violence being hidden in both churches and the wider community.

More information:
www.wewillspeakout.org



Wear orange to end violence against women

The WCRC is encouraging people to wear orange on the 25th of each month as part of a global campaign to raise awareness about violence against women. The United Nations promotes the 25th of the month as Orange Day when women and men are urged to wear something orange as a symbol of opposition to violence against women.

"This UN initiative matches WCRC's concern for stopping the repeated and horrific crimes to which women and girls worldwide are subjected," said Dora Arce-Valentín, WCRC Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership.

Orange Day was launched in July 2012 by the United Nations Secretary-General's *UNiTE to End Violence against Women* campaign. The aim is to raise awareness about this issue each month, and not only once a year on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

"WCRC is committed to working with member churches to sound the alarm about abuse of women and children," said Arce-Valentín. "We want to work with them to address the conditions

that lead to violence. This includes creating positive, non-violent models of masculinity."

Douwe Visser, the WCRC's Executive Secretary for Theology and Communion, said that much of the violence against women has been and is still



committed by Christians, often justified on the basis of biblical texts. Visser described such a reading of the Bible as blasphemy, and violence against women as sin, "evil that destroys the relation between human beings and between them and God".

More information:
endviolence.un.org/orangeday.shtml

Helping member churches to flourish and grow



Photo: CRC

Partnership Fund supports church centre in Burma

By Páraic Réamonn

Christians face many difficulties in Burma, a predominantly Buddhist country that is still in transition from military dictatorship. For 25 years, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) was prevented from building a centre in Matupi, in southwest Burma, but in 2009 the local government granted permission. Two construction engineers from the church offered their services free, and much of the work has been done by voluntary labour. In 2011, the WCRC Partnership Fund made a grant to the project.

The Hannie Memorial Centre is named after the former leader of the CRC women's association, who died in 2008. It includes a medical clinic, a pharmacy, a book store and a library; a space for prayer and meditation open to people of all faiths; and offices for the church, the women's association, and the youth department.

Matupi is in a mountainous region where construction materials must be carried 200 miles on a narrow, bumpy road, and rain frequently stops work. In the first years, local government also often interrupted construction for months at a time. Under the transitional regime, building has been able to proceed without government hindrance. The church expects the centre to open in May 2014.

Helping a vulnerable minority church in a fragile social context to build a church centre is one of many

ways in which the Partnership Fund assists WCRC member churches across the global South to construct community and reach out to their neighbours.

The Partnership Fund itself is currently in transition, with WCRC staff member Douwe Visser, who has overall responsibility, moving to the WCRC office in Hanover at the beginning of January. I shall continue to work from our Geneva office until I retire at the end of June 2014, when I shall be replaced by a new Deputy Coordinator who will also have responsibility for making payments. These new arrangements should help the Fund to flourish and grow in years to come – and help our member churches to flourish and grow too.

Páraic Réamonn is Deputy Coordinator of the Partnership Fund

The WCRC Partnership Fund is a solidarity fund that helps member churches carry out mission or development projects. Implementing partners are churches in the global South and Eastern Europe that carry out projects which are important for the life of a church and its surrounding community. To apply for a grant of up to CHF 30,000, visit wrc.ch/partnership-fund/ or email partnershipfund@wrc.ch. Applications from member churches that have not previously applied are particularly welcome.

2017 Reformation anniversary must be 'global and ecumenical' event

The 2017 Reformation jubilee, commemorating the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 Theses in Wittenberg, Germany, needs to be celebrated as a "festival of faith" across national and denominational boundaries, said organizers of the International Congress on the Reformation Jubilee, held in Zurich in October.

"We do not celebrate ourselves, but the setting free of the Gospel," said Gottfried Locher, President of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, which co-organized the congress with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

Organizers said the choice of Zurich for the congress was intended to underline the plural nature of the Reformation. Like Wittenberg and Geneva, Zurich was one of the centres of the Reformation.

Margot Kässmann, the EKD's ambassador for the Reformation anniversary, described herself as being impressed with the wealth of ideas and projects described by the 250 congress participants.

"I am very confident that the Reformation anniversary will be able to be celebrated in a global and ecumenical perspective," she said.

Thanks

As the WCRC moves its head operational offices from Geneva to Hannover, the General Secretary wishes to thank the dedicated staff who have served the communion with such remarkable professionalism. Hartmut Lucke has been a great colleague who has been a faithful volunteer for more than ten years. Yueh Cho has been the Finance Coordinator since October 2010. Ida Milli has been the Assistant to the General Secretary from October 2012. Sybille Graumann joined the team in 2013 for the last few months. In the last month of operation, two interns, Frans du Plessis and Viktoria Koczian also completed their internship.



New general secretary for WCRC

A search committee has started work on the appointment of a new general secretary for the WCRC to succeed Setri Nyomi in 2014, and is reviewing nominations and applications for the position. The convenor of the search committee is Clifton Kirkpatrick, former President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Other members are Jerry Pillay (WCRC President), Bas Plaisier, Najla Kassab Abou Sawan, Veronica Muchiri, Clayton Leal da Silva and Robert Setio.

More information about the process is available on the WCRC website at www.wcrc.ch

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Setri Nyomi, General Secretary
(Photo: Helen Putsman-Penet)

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

Advent is with us again. For Joseph, it was a time of struggle and confusion. He was comfortable within a culture in which how everything worked for centuries was fully understood. For his bride to be expecting a child even before the marriage threw him in a state of confusion. Culturally the only option he knew was to cancel the marriage plans and this would bring some form of shame. It is in this state of struggle that Joseph experienced the angel’s presence in a dream.

The angel brought a message with which Joseph could address the situation of moving outside his familiar comfortable territory into an experience he did not know how to handle. The message encouraged Joseph not to be afraid and explained the source and nature of the child growing inside Mary. Then the angel added a message that goes beyond Joseph. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, the angel revealed a name for the child to be born that spelled security through struggles and challenges for Joseph as well as for women and men of all nations, generations and across all kinds of boundaries: “They shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us’.”

Today many people are going through all kinds of struggles. The people of Syria and other nations continue to face violence and uncertain times. The global economy continues to be a source of oppression for millions. Gender-based violence continues to plague the world. Some churches are dealing with conflicts which threaten to divide them. In states of struggle and confusion, we too can experience the good news of Advent in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Emmanuel: God is with us through the struggle.

God has been with us all along. We are grateful to God for being with us in the 138 years of the WCRC and its antecedents. We especially thank God for being with us in the 65 years in which the operating office has been in Geneva. We thank God for the hospitality of the Swiss churches in hosting us for the last 65 years and for their continuing support as we move from this familiar territory with which we have become comfortable into a new area. We are grateful to God for sister organizations with whom we have shared the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. Emmanuel, God has been with us while the office operated in Geneva and God will be with us when we venture into the unknowns in Hannover. Whatever our situation, it is my hope that we may all experience God’s presence and the hope that this brings. Emmanuel – God is with us. God has been with us. God will always be with us wherever we go. Let us journey into the New Year with confidence because God is with us.

*God will always be
with us wherever
we go*

Reformed **communiqué**

December 2013
Vol.4, No.3

Reformed Communiqué is published quarterly by the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

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wrcrc@wrcrc.ch
or send a request by post to:

WCRC

Global Office
(Until 31 December 2013)
150 route de Ferney, PO Box 2100
1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
Tel. +41 22 791 6240
fax +41 22 791 6505

(From 01 January 2014)

Calvin Centre
Knochenhauerstrasse 42
30159 Hannover, Germany
Tel/fax to be announced in
January 2014

email: wrcrc@wrcrc.ch
web: www.wrcrc.ch

Editor: Stephen Brown
Layout: The Lutheran World
Federation
Printed in Switzerland
by SRO Kundig



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Called to
communion,
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Prayers online

Is your church in need of prayers? Is it concerned for the situation of churches in other parts of the world? The WCRC website has prayer resources for you.

Visit www.wrcrc.ch regularly for inspiration for prayer.