

## REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

“Living God, Renew and Transform Us” – Romans 12:2, Luke 4:16, Jeremiah 10:10

1. Giving thanks to the Living God I begin my report by affirming that the WCRC on its many levels is embracing the call for renewal embodied in our general council theme. Thanks to the faithfulness, prayer, hard work and dedication of the officers, executive committee members, staff, regional councils and member churches we are, despite considerable past and on-going challenges, moving forward with renewed vigour on many fronts. The call to renewal and transformation has inspired us not to conform but to turn around and renew ourselves for our mission.
2. As a World Communion we are all aware that our entire world, people and planet, are in a multi-dimensional crisis that engulfs our global life together in all its dimensions—politically, economically, socially, culturally, religiously, ecologically and militarily with massive threats to life, sustainability and wellbeing. In this we continue to see that the inequity, systemic racism, war, poverty and violence are deeply rooted in and driven by an inherently unjust and ecologically destructive economic and financial system that works against the “life abundant for all” that is at the core of the mission of Jesus Christ and therefore our own (John 10:10, Luke 4:16ff).
3. We begin with our turning to the Living God and in that prayer and confession we reject all systems, ideologies, regimes and idols that that impose domination, division, destruction, despair, suffering and death over God’s creation (Jeremiah 10.10, the Belhar and Accra Confessions).
4. This last year has seen a deepening and worsening of this global crisis beyond the long list of terrible and terrifying events and crises that impact specific places, sectors, classes, genders and contexts. We see the writing on the wall and are just now grasping the true global dimension of the crisis, and from that deep place we cry out to God to renew us for the transformation of the world.
5. At the same that the WCRC as a family—spread out over 110 countries and comprising over 80 million people—enables us to have a global vision that allows to see the extent of the crisis, we are well positioned to see the power of God’s Spirit at work in love, witness, healing, reconciliation, service, justice and peacemaking. In the enormity of the challenges we see enormous signs of God’s grace and goodness. Our theological tradition in this family of Reformed and reforming churches allows and empowers us to fully acknowledge the crisis and threat to life while celebrating God’s liberating and transforming grace without ever doubting the full power of God’s presence nor the full extent of God’s call to us to participate in God’s mission as revealed through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us (Luke 4:16).
6. My last report in 2015 situated the challenges facing us as a Communion within the mandate of the Uniting General Council as specifically expressed in the 2011

strategic plan. We left Lebanon determined to refocus our efforts in light of that plan “live out the Communion of Reformed churches, participating in God’s mission, that all may experience the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.” It has been a full and, in many ways, tumultuous year. Yet by God’s grace even in the face of worsening world situation and challenges to our unity as a Communion and ongoing financial challenges we are moving forward and are better placed than in recent year to focus on the high vision of the plan.

7. As I remind us of the statement of intended achievements of the plan, we will all see that we are not where we need to be with one year left before the 2017 General Council and must discern well what we can accomplish together in the remaining time .

8. The plan places a strategic emphasis on five key directions for the work and witness of the WCRC: mission, communion, justice, theology and ecumenical engagement with the overall aim that by the end of 2017 the WCRC will:

be known as a communion that unites Reformed churches in God’s mission in our world. Our internal relationships will evidence the oneness for which Jesus prayed. The WCRC will have significantly contributed to the world Churches’ 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 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 revenue from member churches. (*WCRC Strategic Plan, adopted May 2011*)

9. As I present the report of the past year’s activities, including the report on the planning for the general council, please keep this lofty vision in mind as you hear what we have accomplished so far and what we have yet to do. We spoke last year of bringing the plan back into play. As some financial, organisational and staffing issues have challenged us, we have done so to a limited extent, and we are now positioned to do more but not all. We come late but are very blessed to have the opportunity of the upcoming general council to further build our Communion and make our witness for justice, peace and reconciliation as a confessing communion committed to justice. At the end of the report I will represent a proposal for the final year of our strategic plan, as adopted by the officers for the consideration of the executive.

10. In the last year we have continued to put the WCRC back on the map with many of our member churches and within the ecumenical community. Through extensive visits and contribution to key events and occasions by the president, general

secretary and staff, through well received regional consultations and networks. Through participation in ecumenical processes we are slowly re-establishing our presence with some who felt us far from them in the last number of years through our presence, our theological and justice seeking contributions. Through participation in situations of conflict and discord as mediators and facilitators, we have been in the last year making a qualitative shift where we get clear and growing feedback that our leadership is being felt and appreciated. This has involved travel and involvement in the life of our churches and the ecumenical movement. The effects of heavy travel and time out of the office have netted significant outcomes in terms of building relationships, making a contribution in times of crisis and conflict, bringing the Reformed and United and Uniting voices to bear on pressing issues, raising the profile of the WCRC and fundraising but had an obvious negative impact on the staff team and the functioning of the office. In conversations with the president and officers we have worked at finding a constructive balance. This included both reducing travel and even more intentionally addressing staff team building.

11. We have made steady progress in addressing the organisational and administrative challenges of transferring and setting up the appropriate systems and structures for the effective operation of the Hannover office. It has taken time to put the financial systems in place and address inherited weakness and problems, but as the report from the financial office shows we are well on our way with the solving past problems, and a very positive auditors report testifies to this progress—with great thanks to the finance staff team.
12. A very significant issue beyond the usual challenges with information technology and record management has been the database. We were at less than 60% accuracy and efficiency. This had a negative impact on all aspects of our life and work including membership fee and general council planning and participation. As instructed by last year's executive significant staff time, energy and resources were devoted to a new database that now is working much better and has positioned us well for general council and our regular needs. A special thanks to Werner Joecker and all who have worked so hard on this
13. Both the president I reported last year on very serious issues within the staff team that began before I took office. Since then considerable efforts have been made to address staff team and personnel issue and overall office management and administration. A professional consultant was brought in for team building work with the whole staff and individuals, and the president, accompanied by the officers acting as a personnel committee, have with the general secretary played an active role to address the issues. I have worked at improving internal communication in the office, at being more physically present in the office and restoring more regular staff meetings. The situation has improved greatly and there is an overall positive sense of forward movement as we address issues together.
14. There have been changes in the staff team itself. Amritha Perumalla joined the team as administrative assistant to both the TMC and the J&P executive secretaries. She is

on parental leave until August. Emelda Ndipewah has been ably filling the role until Amritha's return. Claudia Duval, the assistant to the general secretary left in January 2016 to take up new challenges teaching refugees. We are all aware of her significant contributions in often very stressful times and great efforts on behalf of the WCRC, and we wish her the very best. Katrina Mertz began in January and is already very much on board as assistant to the general secretariat. Welcome Katrina. Rev. Dr. Hanns Lessing joined the team as general council coordinator, working part time for part of last year and now full time. We heartily welcome Hanns and are especially grateful to the Church of Westphalia in Germany who has seconded Hanns to us and who have agreed to support the entire cost of salary and support until the end of 2017; not only a significant addition to our team but a great contribution to our general council budget. Our team is enriched by two interns this year Ms. Wan-Jou Lin from the PCT and Doyoung Chung from the PROK.

15. The change with greatest impact for us concerns our executive secretary for theology, mission and communion, Rev. Dr. Douwe Visser. Douwe has had significant pain and mobility issues over the last number of years that have steadily gotten worse. He was scheduled for knee replacement surgery on May 6 and after rehabilitation and rest will have surgery on the other knee. With the combined surgeries and rehabilitation process he would be off work and out of the office for the better part of the year. In face of this long absence and then seeing the moving right into a general council, Douwe has decided to ask for early retirement so that he will transition directly from his sick leave period into retirement. Douwe feels this is not only best for the WCRC but will also allow him to enjoy his new found mobility and enjoy a longer retirement free of the pain and distress that has afflicted him. Exact dates and details will follow. It is expected that Douwe will join us for the general council, although not in a specific staff role, and we will be well able to express our appreciation and gratitude for his significant ministry to the REC, WARC and WCRC fully at that time. For now we hold him in our thoughts and prayers for his surgery and recovery and rehabilitation, remembering and appreciating his wife Antoinette with thanks also for her service to the WCRC. As this is a sudden development I have asked Dr. Aruna Gnanadason to serve as a consultant working mostly from India to help in the coming months to ensure continuity and follow up in the TMC responsibilities. Aruna has served in the past several GITs as dean of students, so we have asked her to take the staff lead role in ensuring the planning and implementation of GIT. I offer a special thanks to Aruna for stepping in at the very last moment so willingly and generously. More detail on future staff plans will follow.

### **Theology, Mission and Communion**

16. The work of TMC addresses directly four of the five directives in the strategic plan of 2011. You will have read the report of Douwe already, and so I will simply highlight several points from his report:
  - The next Global Institute of Theology will be held in 2017, in conjunction with the general council. It will be in Wuppertal before moving to Leipzig when the

council begins. The core staff team will be Aruna Gnanadason with Musa Dube as academic dean. Andrew Donaldson will lead worship while Bas Plaisier will be president. Preparatory meetings have already taken place and plans are proceeding well. Assisting in the formulation of the GIT's curriculum will be our network of theologians, who will gather again at the beginning of 2017.

- *Reformed World* saw two issues published in 2016, the second being a double volume. As requested by last year's executive, Phil Tanis has worked on the production and distribution side of the publication while Douwe remained editor, taking responsibility for content. The first edition of 2017 will be focused on human trafficking with content coordinated through the J&P office. A staff team will coordinate the remaining issues this year and leading into the general council. See appendix 1 for more details.
- A consultation on "mission in secularised contexts" was held in Hungary earlier this year. The next "Mission on the Frontline" consultation will be addressed below.
- A number of important dialogues have continued in the last year. The Roman Catholic-Reformed dialogue has concluded, and a draft of the dialogue's final report is available for your review. The Anglican-Reformed dialogue held a second meeting in India last October, focused on "communion." And the first meeting with Pentecostal representatives on "mission" was held in Turkey in December. While all of these dialogues have been meaningful to participants and have produced important documents, an evaluation of how ecumenical dialogues should be structured and utilised going forward is recommended.
- Affiliation with the JDDJ and work toward a so-called "Wittenberg Statement" have both made progress and will be taken up below, though it can be noted that a working group on the latter will gather in Hannover in late June under the coordination of Aruna.

## **Justice and Partnership**

17. Our executive secretary for justice and partnership, Dora Arce Valentin, has also been active on a number of strategically important programmes. I raise the following highlights to you:

- The consultations marking the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession noted a need for additional follow-up sessions. These have been done through two (so far) consultations bringing together two regions in each under the theme "Gender reading of the signs of the times." The first meeting was held in Africa and included Northeast Asia participation while the second brought together the Americas—AIPRAL and CANAAC—here in Cuba.

- The Oikotree Movement, which allows us to work in partnership with CWM and WCC on justice issues, has produced two books, both of which are available for your review [here](#).
- A special focus of the past year has been on human trafficking. The Lenten “Broken for You” resource was reviewed and additional goals defined at a meeting on the US-Mexico border of the task group last summer. One of the results is the aforementioned issue of Reformed World, which will deepen the theological foundations of these actions.
- While parts of the NIFEA project have continued—such as the GEM school to be held in Hong Kong later this summer—others have stalled. A working group from within the WCRC was thus called together to re-start and re-focus the WCRC’s contribution on this project. This has helped make us ready to re-launch the NIFEA project with some vigour.
- Gender justice issues remain a key part of the office’s work. The theological scholarship for women continues, as does cooperation with our UN office to promote a number of advocacy and awareness campaigns. A task group on women’s ordination met twice and will present an important document for your consideration: “Towards a Declaration on Faith on Women’s Ordination.” This document will address the mandate to consider whether women’s ordination is binding on the Communion.

## Finances

18. As already mentioned we have made great strides this year, despite unexpected increases in pension fund obligations. As you’ll see in the report from the office of finance, we came in very close to budget expenses in 2015—but with a sizeable surplus of over 220,000 euro, much of this due to currency fluctuations that were to our benefit. We have seen our assets, general reserve fund and long-term stabilization fund (the UEK Fund) grow.
19. The audit report was very positive, and for this we again thank our finance staff team, Anna Krüger and Gerhard Plenter. The team is confident that the several recommendations from the audit report will be implemented in a timely manner.
20. The pension fund obligations are a continuing concern. Due to extremely low interest rates and mandates from the German government, we have had to significantly increase the amount of money placed in our pension fund for our executive staff. The finance committee is looking at alternatives to remaining in this system to relieve the financial burden this creates for the organisation—and they will be bringing a report for consideration on this once this very complicated issue is sorted.
21. Despite this challenge a balanced budget for 2016 will be presented to this executive for approval, and preliminary figures for 2017 are already in place for review by the

finance committee. A special thank you needs to be given to the many people who assisted in filling the financial gap we had for this year's budget. Concerns continue over the membership fees from churches that constitute the bulk of our core budgeting needs. You will see in the finance report downward trends in contributions from most of our regions. This is noted in appendix 2, a funds development update, which notes the challenges we continue to have putting together a viable strategy to effectively and regularly raise funds on a global scale.

## Communications

22. The communication office, our executive Phil Tanis and assisted by Paul Oppenheim, continues to promote the work of the WCRC through a number of means, all of which emphasize the five key directions of our strategic plan:

- The website is now operating in seven of eight planned languages. A new blog focusing on the entire Communion is operating within the site. More work will be done on the website in the coming months, broadening and deepening the resources available through it while also positioning it for the general council.
- Social media efforts increasingly engage the Communion with its members, partners and the broader world while the monthly eNews continues to highlight stories, prayer requests and resources.
- The *Reformed Communiqué* is now being published three times each year as a multi-lingual newsletter. It contains articles already featured on the website, some new features and a regular column from me. It will increasingly and strategically focus on the general council in the coming year, including modifying its mailing list to ensure all participants receive important news.
- A limited edition print, made of a specially commissioned painting, will be a primary gift from the Communion to be utilized by the president and myself as we represent the WCRC around the world in the coming year. I'm pleased to say that each of you will receive a copy at this meeting.
- Also available at this meeting is the *2015 Annual Report*, which is a key part of the funds development efforts in North America. The annual appeal in that region continues to bring money in for our endowment. The North Americans will also be utilising the general council's visitors programme to build support for the Communion.
- Very important networking has taken place with the WCC, CWM and CEC communication departments.
- Work on the general council is also being supported by the communications office, and you'll see some of the results—the folder, poster and button. More is coming, including work on the website, brochures in multiple languages and

more. Phil has also provided input into the discernment process, based on his work with the Reformed Church in America.

### **Reformed Partnership Fund**

23. Werner Joecker's report shows continued good stewardship of the Fund and its continuing impact on our member churches around the world. I would like to note several points:

- The Fund will be boosted through a large portion of the new money coming from *Otto per Mille* while steady support from both *Brot für die Welt* and *Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen* continues.
- We continue to seek additional sources of funding for the emergency fund.
- The Fund can be utilised by member churches to contribute to special projects, such as the Reformed Church in America did for the Bekaa Valley school project.
- Working cooperatively with the communications office, a branding and marketing strategy is nearing completion for implementation in the coming months.
- You will see in appendix 3 that a plan to compensate for Douwe's absence is being put into place. This will involve a cooperative staff team, though I will assume overall responsibility for the programme, for the time being.

### **2017 General Council**

24. The report of the general council planning committee and the general council coordinator has been circulated. I am pleased to highlight that overall the planning and fundraising is on time and on track. I also would like to note the following:

- The planning committee under the able leadership of Lisa Vander Wal concluded its last meeting just a week ago and its report includes proposals for strengthening consensus building and participatory decision-making. More work is needed on specific details and this executive meeting will try an expanded consensus and discernment approach.
- The worship committee has met under the leadership of Pastor Sabine Dreßler and will meet again in early 2017.
- The local committee is also hard at work.
- Hanns Lessing has made impressive progress in all the major areas of logistics and programme planning.



- The new database is ready to serve both council communications and registration.
  - Exciting ideas are developing for an expanded visitors programme and a Reformed youth camp.
  - There is a permanent general council planning staff group of the WCRC together with the Reformed Alliance of Germany to ensure smooth and creative planning and implementation with the host church. This is going very well. The participation of the local Reformed Church in Leipzig is especially exciting—and the responses from the whole of the United churches in Germany and the EKD have been extremely supportive and positive.
  - Several member churches have already responded to the call for special funding support.
  - The general council budget is balanced thanks to truly extraordinary efforts of Dr. Johann Weusmann, who has spared to time or energy to secure high levels of support from the German government at various levels and the churches in Germany.
25. As the final chapter of the strategic plan indicates, this general council is much more than a constitutionally required business meeting. It is the Communion in action. The vision that the general council powered by the theme “Living God, renew and transform us” will be:
- A testimony confessing the God of Life in all that we do
  - A significant experience of unity and communion-building within the WCRC family
  - Public witness, advocacy and theological articulations for transforming the world rooted in justice, peace, reconciliation and healing
  - A concrete expression of communion living out full equitable participation of men and women, youth, clergy and lay people
  - A significant contribution to Christian unity with Lutherans and lifting up the JDDJ in its positive implications
  - A moment to articulate our faith stance and vision for the next seven years in context of the crisis facing humanity and all creation
26. By God’s grace we have an opportunity for the general council to be a significant expression of God’s mission. We prepare by fully embracing as theme, vision and method the call and commitment to confessing the Living God, renewal and transformation so that all may have life in abundance.

### **Member churches**

27. Following up last year’s WCRC statement on the Middle East has included five visits to and events in Lebanon and Israel-Palestine. This has included participating at

round tables and consultations of our church members, participating in the WCC pilgrimage for justice and peace reference group meeting in Bethlehem and co-sponsoring with CWM a theological symposium on new ways of reading the Bible in reference to the Israeli-Palestinian situation, as well as participating in a German-hosted dialogue with Palestinian theologians and members of the Jewish-Christian dialogue.

28. In South Korea I together with President Jerry Pillay participated in the PROK anniversary assembly, and I attended the PCK assembly. Both the president and I made presentations at an ecumenical peace consultation held just before. As well as reaching out to our member churches we are strengthening our relationships with the NCKK and have been encouraged to play a much more active and visible role with the WCC in the ecumenical forum seeking peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula. We have reached out to the Korean Christian Federation in North Korea, who have historic ties to the WARC, and we are attempting to put forth Korean peninsula peace efforts in support of our Korean church members. Given his long experience, Paul Oppenheim has been serving as special advisor to the general secretary on these issues. He attended a meeting of partner churches committed to the peace progress in Germany late last year. We are especially pleased that Doyoung Chung, one of two interns, is from the PROK.
29. It has been a special privilege to have attended other significant member church assemblies and events since the last executive committee meeting. I was the guest preacher at the PCT mission anniversary (ably translated by Vice President Yueh-Wen Lu).
30. We presently have two interns and are committed to the ecumenical youth leadership development initiative. We are thankful that the PCT has wholly subsidized the cost of the intern from their church.
31. The United Church of Canada's general council meeting was important as they work through a call to transformative change—a feature was celebrating a full communion agreement with the United Church of Christ (USA) and a mutual recognition of ministries agreement with the UCC Philippines, strengthening unity within the Communion. The UCC also has been living into the process of reconciling with Canadian First Nations peoples.
32. In Italy I represented the WCRC at the Waldensian synod, a very compelling meeting as the church works through a new moment in relationship with the Roman Catholic Church and responds with full Gospel zeal, boldness and purpose to the global migration through "Project Mediterranean Hope." We began a conversation with the *Tavolo Valdese* that has now resulted in a 350,000 euro per year agreement for programme and project funding to the Reformed Partnership Fund and other WCRC initiatives through the *Otto per Mille* (or Eight per 1000) programme.
33. The Evangelical Church in Spain invited me to be a speaker at their assembly in Madrid, focusing on the Accra Confession. Many churches are bold in their

embracing the call to both communion and justice and constantly remind us of how historical and central both the Belhar and Accra confessions are for their identity in the WCRC family.

34. I mentioned the visits to our member churches in Lebanon and Syria. I visited our two member churches in Ghana and saw the need to draw closer in dialogue around the issue of human sexuality and communion.
35. For over one and a half years I have been facilitating a dialogue between the Church of Scotland (CoS) and the United Free Church of Scotland (UFCoS), in the context of the UFCoS moving to end a ministry covenant with the CoS. The dialogue is in a reflective pause, but it underlines the urgency to address differences in respectful dialogue especially around issues of human sexuality and interpretation of Scripture. I feel privileged to have been asked to play such a role, which is key and central to the WCRC mission and vision of communion.
36. It has been a real joy to visit Cuba twice, to prepare for this meeting and to participate in two consultations, both co-hosted by the church in Cuba and the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas.

### **Ecumenical relationships**

37. The honest assessment is that we have a good relationship with the WCC, but we must make it much better. The very good news is we are on the way. I serve on the leadership for the reference group for the pilgrimage of justice and peace to bring a Reformed voice and to mobilize our family and other Christian world communions to fully embrace the call to move together for justice and peace. Phil Tanis has worked hard with the WCC director of communication to increase cooperation and synergy. The WCC has already committed generously to second communications staff for the general council. Close working relationships on refugee, Middle East, Korean peninsula and the Colombia peace process issues are being developed.
38. A very important step forward is that we have made significant progress in overcoming the obstacles in working together on the NIFEA initiative. As seen in the justice and partnership report and the strategic plan, we are re-launching with vigor and a sense of urgency. We are thus finding good ways to move ahead on work with the WCC on a number of fronts. We are particularly pleased that Natasha Klukach is here with us representing the WCC. We look forward to her greetings.
39. Within Germany I have been able to participate in the assembly of the Reformed Alliance and the EKD this last year. We are continuing our close cooperation with EMW, and I was pleased to be asked to speak (along with the LWF and WCC general secretaries) at their assembly.
40. We welcome Bishop Medardo Gomez Soto here, representing the LWF and celebrate a dynamic realization of our relationship with them. We are dialoguing fully with the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church on the process of affiliating with the JDDJ,

something they have very strongly invited us to do. We are mutually committed to symbolizing our resolve to move forward with the results of the wholly positive Lutheran-Reformed dialogue. Our aspiration is to celebrate a common declaration that there are no theological impediments to full communion and unity between us and to declare a path forward to put that into practice. I attended the LWF council meeting in Geneva. And there have been several meetings at the staff level to work out the way forward. Rev. Dr. Martin Junge and I maintain regular and fluid communication.

41. I attended the meeting of the Anglican's consultative committee in Lusaka, Zambia. This was the first time since 1984 that WARC/WCRC was present at an ACC meeting so this was truly historic. We have an ongoing dialogue with the Anglicans and the theme is communion. We certainly have much to learn from them as they seek to affirm communion in the face of great threats to unity.
42. There are still challenges to understand fully how to strengthen bi-lateral relations among Protestants in a way that also advances and does not impede the grand vision of visible unity with all the churches.
43. We are very pleased with successfully completion of the most recent Roman Catholic-Reformed dialogue and look forward to our 10 June audience with Pope Francis and the meetings with the PCPCU and PCJP. We welcome Fr. Avelino González-Ferrer, and look forward to a deep and dynamic fellowship and relationship with him.
44. A rich and important part of our WCRC identity and family are the United and Uniting churches. At the welcoming service when the WCRC moved to Hannover a challenge was put by a leader of the German United *Landkirche*, suggesting that a change of name might make it possible for United churches such as hers to join the WCRC. The Reformed Alliance wrote a letter to the general secretary and president suggesting we consider this or some other way to signaling the United/Uniting part of our identity. Among the proposals for constitutional revision you will find one suggesting a possible solution. Late last year the faith and order commission of the WCC convened a meeting of United and Uniting churches in Chennai. These meetings have been held every seven or so years. I attended and was excited by the energy and many questions raised about the coming together of the United/Uniting (those who want to) and the relationships with the WCC and Christian world communions like the WCRC. We seem to have the greatest number of United/Uniting churches and feature as a key part of our identity so we need to increase the dialogue about the imperative for unity and our relationship to the United/Uniting churches. Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson who is here was named the convener of that group. One proposal for us to consider is to make space in the general council for a presentation and dialogue with the United/Uniting group.
45. The United/Uniting meeting was hosting by the Church of South India (CSI). While at the United/Uniting meeting we were caught in the worst flooding in Chennai in a century. We are so grateful for the concern and assistance of our hosts, who

attended us while reaching out to the affected, which included their own people. It was impressive to see the CSI mobilize in diaconal service and relief. We give thanks to God for this.

46. In London I attended my first meeting of the conference of secretaries of the Christian world communions. This is an important ecumenical table. I was moved and encouraged by the level of trust and honest sharing and determination to be together of the Christian world communions.
47. We are ably represented on the steering committee of the Global Christian Forum (GCF) by Rev. Dr. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson. Jerry Pillay represented us and was a speaker at the GCF's "Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom" consultation and will bring his full report. We are very pleased that Dr. Larry Miller, the general secretary of the GCF, is here with us and we await his comments.
48. We are grateful for the ongoing collaboration with the United Nations office and its staff, Ryan Smith and Rev. Mark Koenig, most especially around our anti-human trafficking work. We hope as part of the final stage of the strategic plan to have a conversation and consultation about how the WCRC can be more intentional and focused in UN advocacy work with the office.
49. I have met several times with Cowan Collin, the general secretary of the Council for World Mission, in order to strengthen our already deep and vital relationship. Although not able to be with us, Collin sends his warmest and deepest greetings. Along with a renewed mutual commitment for the re-launching of the NIFEA process, we have agreed to hold joint staff meetings in the near future. We will also have a "follow-up summit" meeting with officers to seek next steps to the agreement we currently have including to explore the future sustainability issues in light of the one million pound endowment grant.
50. We have guests with us from two other important ecumenical partners: WACC is with us for the second executive committee, this time represented by Lorenzo Vargas, and we wish to deepen and strengthen this relationship. We continue to explore a dynamic relationship with the WSCF and welcome the new general secretary, Necta Montes, who is here with us.
51. Alaying fears of isolation we have received many visitors in the Hannover office, including member churches from Myanmar, Brazil, Argentina, India and Switzerland, as well as ecumenical organizations such as the WCC and Council for European Churches.

## **Regional councils**

52. The strategic plan makes clear that we must attend to the many issues concerning empowering regions and clarifying relationships. Among the constitutional revisions proposed there is a proposal for clarification about the relationship of officers to the regional councils. There is much activity and creativity in some councils and much

concern for improvement in others. The strategic plan proposes a consultation process to give the regions the attention needed.

## **Strategic plan**

53. I prepared the following proposal, which was then amended and approved by the officers, to summarize and focus our work until the 2017 General Council:

### **Final Phase: January 2016-June 2017**

#### *Introduction*

54. The 2011 Strategic Plan (SP) was put in place to guide the Communion in carrying out its vision and purpose to be a living and effective expression of “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3) in order to share in God’s mission in the world.

55. The plan places a strategic emphasis on five key directions for the work and witness of the WCRC: mission, communion, justice, theology and ecumenical engagement with the overall aim that by the end of 2017 the WCRC will:

be known as a communion that unites Reformed churches in God’s mission in our world. Our internal relationships will evidence the oneness for which Jesus prayed. The WCRC will have significantly contributed to the world Churches’ 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 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 revenue from member churches. (*WCRC Strategic Plan, adopted May 2011*)

56. This plan is in its last phase with just over one year left before the 2017 General Council (2017GC). The WCRC is not where it needs to be if the high goals and aspirations set out in the plan are to be met even on the basic level. There are important achievements in some of the strategic areas and at the same time the period since 2011 has been marked by very significant challenges in terms of organisational sustainability, leading to the decision to relocate the organisational offices from Geneva, Switzerland, to Hannover, Germany, which at the same time overlapped with a transition period in the general secretariat. The living into the new vision of the WCRC as a united communion, the financial crisis, the move and the extended search for a new general secretary has meant that the WCRC has not been able to apply itself to the major challenges of the SP with the necessary vigour, focus and resources.

57. Notwithstanding, in this final phase of the SP there is the opportunity to focus on drawing the plan to a close in such a way as to maximize the achievements of the key challenges in 2016-2017 and additionally report our successes, shortcomings and learnings to the 2017GC by preparing for the meeting in such a way as to enter into the council with a focused and understood proposal for the vision of the WCRC for the 2017-2024 period in order to: inspire, mobilize, strengthen and lift up the mission of the member churches and the Communion as a whole on all levels for the renewal of the churches to contribute ecumenically, inter-religiously and with the wider global civil society for the transformation of the world in response to the call of the living God (Romans 12:2, Luke 4, Jeremiah 10:10).

#### *Foci 2016*

58. The strategic focus for 2016 will be identifying a limited number of key outcomes that have to be achieved in 2016 to move the WCRC forward with its stated goals for 2017 as mentioned in the SP while at the same time contributing to and assuring the effective planning and successful meeting of the 2017GC. The council is not an end itself but will, if successful, contribute significantly to carrying out the core vision and mission of the WCRC in both consolidating communion and advancing the justice God calls for. The following lists the *key* strategic proposals; it is *not* a list of all activities or programmes already dealt with in the SP.

#### *Mission*

59. While continuing to work with ecumenical partners like the WCC, CWM and EMW on a variety of mission activities our specific strategic focus will be to implement the postponed **Mission on the Frontlines** conference in the context of religion, violence and peace-building with special attention to supporting Middle Eastern and African churches. The event will be planned and implemented with a view to deepening the collaboration between and among the offices of theology, mission and communion (TMC), justice and partnership (J&P) and general secretariat (GS) as per the SP. The event will be held in the last quarter of 2016.

#### *Communion*

60. It is widely acknowledged that there needs to be more specific follow up to the 2014 Communion Consultation. The issue of human sexuality now presents itself more that ever before as both a church-dividing and communion-dividing issue. It is proposed that in the second semester of 2016 WCRC convene a **consultation on communion and human sexuality** to provide an opportunity and the safe space to explore in mutual respect how the WCRC can ensure that we maintain and deepen our unity in the face of our differences while drawing on the gifts and theological and biblical perspectives of our Reformed tradition.

61. One of the major instruments and working methods in the SP for building communion is regional councils and implementing work regionally. In fact there is

considerable concern that regions are not getting the support and clarity need to function well. It is proposed that in the second half of 2016 to hold **a consultation with the members of the officers group and the leadership of the regional councils** to make specific proposals and take next steps to ensure that regional councils are appropriately empowered.

### *Justice*

62. In addition to the ongoing work of J&P it is imperative to make a bold move in 2016 to ensure WCRC leadership in **the re-launching of the NIFEA initiative** and begin to make a global impact on the urgent concerns of economic and ecological injustice. It is planned to **have a small and focused meeting in April 2016** to plan and implement next steps. Funds have been secured for the next steps. Collaboration with the WCC is already taking place for two programmes but the strategic focus is to take the NIFEA vision to the next level. In addition there will be a reinvigorating of the justice network to present a vision of WCRC justice work beyond 2017, as well as a consultation about how to strengthen our UN New York office work.
63. In gender justice the focus will include a very special focus on the full participation of women in the ministry and leadership of the church with a special report from the task group on the **ordination of women**. This includes with the GS and the executive committee concrete and specific steps to ensure the required equity and balances in the delegates to the 2017GC and ensuring full and equitable participation by women, youth and men in all WCRC events, activities and publications.

### *Theology*

64. In addition to the ongoing dialogues and *Reformed World*, a key priority will be the GIT in 2017. And there will be two specific strategic foci strongly linked to the 2017GC, with both also following up from previous dialogues and intersecting with ecumenical engagement. A consultation with member churches and decision-making concerning **WCRC association with the JDDJ** will include articulating the WCRC contribution through a signing statement on Justice and Justification which has been a focus of the Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue. The second special focus is follow up to the Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue aiming to make a significant contribution towards Lutheran-Reformed communion through a joint declaration to be made in the context of the 2017GC called provisionally the **“Wittenberg Declaration.”** A WCRC drafting group has been convened for the end of June to produce our proposal to the Lutherans for a road map and the content. This involves both the GS and the TMC offices.

### *Ecumenical Engagement*

65. We are now in a better position to give the kind of leadership ecumenically that the SP imagines. **GS leadership in the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP) Reference Group and more emphasis on WCRC participation in the PJP is proposed as a priority, as well as more focus on ecumenical collaboration on key WCRC**



**public witness foci.** In 2016 special attention will be given public witness and advocacy that is important to members of our Communion and in close collaboration with the WCC and the wider ecumenical movement, specifically:

- Peace and Reconciliation on the **Korean peninsula**: Working with the PCK, PROK, NCKK and WCC, a WCRC-led delegation to North Korea in 2016. WCRC leadership in peace advocacy.
- Supporting member churches and regional leadership in the **Colombia** Peace Process: advocacy, accompaniment, empowerment and behind-the-scenes international ecumenical diplomacy. Delegations, visits, advocacy campaigns.
- **Middle East** including Israel-Palestine: support member churches and WCC consensus advocacy.
- **South Sudan**: with the ACRC plan a pastoral visit in 2016 as part of a wider Africa visit to areas of protracted violence and conflict.
- Strengthening direct relations with other communions: the general secretary will attend the **Anglican Consultative Council** in Zambia in April. On 10 June, a meeting with **Pope Francis and the Pontifical Councils** on Christian Unity and Justice and Peace will take place. An initiative to meet with the **Mennonites** before the 2017GC will be undertaken.

### *Overarching Strategic Foci*

66. In 2016 special attention and priority must be given to **organisational sustainability**. This includes fundraising and institutional strengthening, and regional empowerment. A meeting for fundraising and fund development strategy is planned before the end of June.
67. There needs to be overall attention given to regional empowerment and networking in all activities.
68. The top priority is the effective planning in all dimensions for the 2017GC, and attending to the need to enhance regional / global synergy.

### **Conclusion**

69. The Communion is alive and active. Thanks be to God we have witnessed great demonstrations of unity, solidarity, love, service, prayer and compassion among us. We also see real threats to unity and to our Communion itself. We are being constantly called forward to greater unity, greater ecumenical engagement and greater public witness and transformation for justice for the glory of God.
70. I give a special thanks to all those who have encouraged and supported Susan and me. I offer a special thanks to the officers and for the ceaseless and fulsome support of our president, with whom it is a joy to work—and even some times great fun. Your prayers and help have upheld us with God’s help and grace.

71. The next to last word must be for the staff. Work at the WCRC is demanding, intense and stressful all too often. We have struggled to build back up to a staff team spirit we aspire to. We are getting there thanks to the dedicated efforts of Anna, Werner, Amritha, Emelda, Claudia, Katrina, Claudia, Gerhard, Douwe, Hanns, Dora, Phil, Doyoung and Wan-Jou. We give thanks for your gifts, skills and dispositions to serve—and thanks to your families for their support to us through you. We give thanks in a special way for the ministry and work of Douwe, and lift him up in our prayers as he begins recovery after his first surgery.

72. Living God, renew and transform us. So be it. To God be the glory.

**GENERAL SECRETARY REPORT: APPENDIX 1**  
**ACTION PLAN FOR *REFORMED WORLD***

With the medical leave and early retirement of Douwe Visser, discussions have taken place about how to ensure that *Reformed World* continues for the coming year. Staff have agreed to work collaboratively to produce the journal through the 2017 General Council.

Specifically, Phil Tanis will continue to coordinate the production and distribution of the journal while Chris Ferguson will act as editor in chief. Dora Arce Valentin had already been given responsibility for the content of the first issue of 2016, which will contain theological essays focused on human trafficking (articles have been solicited but not all received). Aruna Gnanadason will review the essays from the “Secularisation in Europe” conference held in Hungary earlier this year for possible use in the second issue. She will also review other submissions already received for potential future use. The third issue of 2016 and the first of 2017 will be devoted to themes that lead the Communion toward the 2017 General Council. Hanns Lessing will take the editorial lead on these.

It is also anticipated that the editorial advisory board will be re-engaged to both assist on content as well as begin to look at the action passed by last year’s executive committee (which has not yet been addressed):

Appoint a small group to develop a strategic plan for the ongoing publication of *Reformed World*, taking into consideration matters such as theological editing, budget, investment of staff time, target readership and distribution, and details of publication, in order to best meet the goals of the WCRC with the resources that are available.

## GENERAL SECRETARY REPORT: APPENDIX 2 FUNDS DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is a membership-based organization, primarily composed of churches/denominations. Its 225+ member churches, gathered together as a General Council, are responsible for setting the direction of the organization. Between councils, they are also responsible to fund the organization itself. This is not to say that all of the operations of the organization are funded through the membership, but it has been decided that the “core” operations of the organization should be sustained through the membership.

In order to ensure that this happens, the executive committee adopted a “grid” of membership fees, based on a number of criteria including church size and the economic context in which the church operates. The intention of the grid was to ensure that not only was the organization properly funded but that it was funded fairly and equitably.

Due to a number of factors, the levels of financial support from the membership have not been met. And while the total sum collected generally stays within a stable range, the amounts coming from each region fluctuate, with most showing a downward trends.

	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Membership Africa	EUR 49,292	EUR 35,393	EUR 15,313
Membership Latin America	EUR 4,784	EUR 8,488	EUR 4,149
Membership CANAAC	EUR 228,394	EUR 230,028	EUR 275,951
Membership Asia	EUR 60,770	EUR 53,901	EUR 59,909
Membership Pacific	EUR 12,054	EUR 4,720	EUR 3,714
Membership Europe (incl. SCC; 5% WCRC Europe)	EUR 510,646	EUR 467,644	EUR 473,013
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>EUR 865,940</b>	<b>EUR 800,174</b>	<b>832,049</b>

These issues were noted some time ago. It was also realized that diversifying the income of the organization was important. Programme offices have had a tradition of raising money to fund their activities. The North American Trustees have been working to create an endowment from which the WCRC can draw funds. And CWM provided a “challenge grant” to spur the fundraising endeavors:

The purpose of the grant is to initially contribute to WCRC, the recipient, an amount specified below for the creation of an endowment fund which will be invested appropriately, ethically in acceptable form and manner to create an income stream to support the work of WCRC in the world; the grant also aims to initially establish the endowment fund in order for WCRC to raise an amount up to 10 million Swiss francs from other donors to the aforesaid endowment fund.

(Grant agreement between CWM and WCRC)

For a variety of reasons, however, fundraising efforts for an endowment or the core budget have not materialized in any significant way. Attempting to restart the process—as well as

place it in a global, strategic context—last year's executive committee passed the following action:

A funds development committee will be set up consisting of four or five people, chosen by the officers, including at least one member from the finance committee and one from the communications core group. This committee will coordinate funds development for the WCRC as a whole, report to the executive committee and will have authority to create and implement a regionally based and appropriate funds development campaign. The 2016 budget shall include operational provision for the work of this committee.

(Executive Committee Minutes 2015)

The difficulties in fundraising were also seen in the attempt to assemble such a committee. Generating names of potential participants was difficult enough. Successfully convincing people to join such a committee was even harder. In the end, a small group of consultants agreed to gather virtually for an initial discussion about the challenges of fundraising for an organization such as the WCRC. However, due to other circumstances, the meeting wasn't able to happen.

Despite the continuing absence of a global funds development plan, there has been progress on bringing additional funds to the WCRC:

- The Otto per Mille programme will be moving 350,000 euro through the WCRC on an annual basis (with a portion of that taken for administrative fees and placed in the core budget).
- Donations for the justice office were received last fall as a potential budget shortfall emerged (and was thus soon erased).
- The annual appeal in North America continues to bring in donations to the endowment fund, as well as specific projects.
- The 2017 General Council and projects associated with it have found sufficient funds to meet an ambitious budget.
- The UEK fund for the long-term stabilization of the organization was increased by roughly 37% thanks to a final donation given by the United Evangelical Churches in 2015.

And work on specific fundraising tactics is also happening:

- The North American trustees are continuing the cultivation of potential donors by supporting an “enhanced visitors programme” for the 2017 General Council.
- Discussions have begun with CWM to discuss how to better utilize their generous contribution given that using it as a challenge grant for additional fundraising is proving difficult.
- Discussions have been initiated with South Korean members to support a seconded staff member, part of whose portfolio will be focused on fundraising.

A global strategic plan to solicit and raise these funds still remains a challenge to develop. To that end, the consultants have agreed to proceed through a process that will engage each in their own contexts to better delineate and define appropriate ways to obtain funds. It is

expected that a report compiling their individual inputs will be collected later this year. Once that report is finished, next steps—including the constitution of a funds development committee as called for at the 2015 Executive Committee meeting—can proceed.

**GENERAL SECRETARY REPORT: APPENDIX 3**  
**ACTION PLAN FOR THE REFORMED PARTNERSHIP FUND**

With the medical leave and early retirement of Douwe Visser, discussions have taken place about how to ensure a continued smooth operation of the Reformed Partnership Fund (RPF). Thankfully the RPF is blessed with Werner Joecker, an excellent coordinator, and fully functioning evaluation systems that include an active board and chairperson. None of this will change.

Chris Ferguson will assume overall responsibility for the programme (working within the established systems noted above). Chris Ferguson will take the lead position for representations of the RPF in public meetings (such as at *Brot für die Welt*), but have the option of appointing another staff member to go in his place. This includes all donor relation responsibilities.

For day-to-day operations, Phil Tanis will act as supervisor of Werner. Phil will also be the coordinator of a staff team that will gather regularly to conduct preliminary evaluations of applications (basically serving as a collective Douwe). The staff team will be comprised of Phil, Chris and Dora Arce-Valentin.