

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT

Rev. Prof. Jerry Pillay

Introduction

1. As I begin to write this report, we have just come out of our Easter celebration so the focus on the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, is still fresh on my mind. The experience of Easter is always one that leaves a fresh imprint in my heart and mind of the challenges we encounter as we seek to follow Christ in this world.
2. The theme for this executive committee meeting is the same that we have proposed for our 2017 General Council: *“Living God, Renew and Transform us.”* We thought it might be appropriate to use the same theme as part of our preparation for the general council. It is not a theme that you can exhaust because it can be tackled from a number of different angles.
3. The theme reflects a prayer to the “living God” which speaks of God’s presence and power in the world. The Resurrection power tells us that there is nothing in this world that God cannot overcome. The Gospel writer Mark tells us that God in Christ overcomes danger, demons, diseases, death (chapter 5). The cross speaks of the measure that God will go through to restore and save the world. It is all because of love! This theme is reflected as a prayer to God who lives and reigns in the world to make us more like Jesus. It is a prayer that God will make the Church and Christians to be what God wants and wills for us to be, and that God will use us to change the world so that it may reflect God’s reign and presence bringing justice, peace, love and abundance of life to all. But what does it mean to be renewed and transformed?
4. The word “renew” implies that we have lost something, and that we should go back to what we should be, to begin or take up again, to restore to a former state, to replenish, revive or re-establish, to make new. It is the first step to real transformation. In many senses the Church has lost, neglected, forgotten and forsaken its calling. We are called to proclaim the good news of salvation and life in Jesus Christ but we have become side-tracked from our main purpose as Church.
5. The word “transform” means to change completely from inside out. It has the same meaning as transfiguration (Matthew 17:2) or metamorphosis which means to change into another form. The picture here is of a caterpillar which changes into something quite different when it becomes a butterfly. So how do we seek renewal and transformation?
6. The “us” in the theme is a reference to both the Church and the world. We recognise that the Church is in much need of renewal and transformation in as much as the world with all its injustices, corruption, deceit and unrighteousness. We thus need to speak to ourselves first before we can tell the world what to do or not to do. In some senses the Church is a microcosm of the world rather than being a bridgehead to an alternative world filled with justice, peace and fullness of life for all (John 10:10).
7. How does the prayer for renewal and transformation impact on the WCRC? I would like to offer three areas in this regard in which we should seek renewal and transformation: 1) theological, 2) contextual and 3) institutional.

Theological Renewal and Transformation

8. The Reformation embraced a number of quite distinct, yet overlapping, areas of human activity: the reform of both the morals and structures of church and society, new approaches to political issues, shifts in economics thinking, the renewal of Christian spirituality and the reform of Christian doctrine (McGrath 2012). In this section I shall attempt to point out certain aspects of Reformed theology to indicate the need for renewal and transformation.
9. At the heart of the Reformation was the quest to return to the Bible. The Reformation saw a new importance being attached to Scripture—or, perhaps, an ancient view of the importance of Scripture being recovered. The idea of *sola scriptura*, “by Scripture alone,” became one of the great slogans of the Reformers as they sought to bring the practices and beliefs of the Church back into line with those of the Golden Age of Christianity. According to McGrath (2012), if the doctrine of justification by faith alone was the material principle of the Reformation, the principle of *sola scriptura* was its formal principle. If the Reformers dethroned the pope, they enthroned Scripture.
10. Mainstream Reformers had no difficulty with the notion of a “traditional interpretation” of the Bible. In fact they advocated that they were not attempting to start a new Church but were seeking to reform and renew Christianity, which implied affirming continuity with the great historic tradition of Christian faith, stretching back through the patristic era to the Apostles themselves.
11. For example, Calvin asserted that the institutions and regulations of both church and state were required to be grounded in Scripture. Zwingli stated that “the foundation of our religion is the written word, the Scriptures of God.” Heinrich Bullinger stated that the authority of Scripture was absolute and autonomous: “Because it is the Word of God, the holy biblical Scripture has adequate standing and credibility in itself and of itself.” Such views indicate the consistently high view of Scripture adopted by the Reformers. It represents a major point of continuity with medieval theology.
12. The difference between the Reformers and medieval theology at this point concerns how Scripture is *defined* and *interpreted*, rather than the *status* that it is given. It is this interpretation of Scripture in a changing world that becomes a crucial element for renewal and transformation. It is a stark reminder that the Reformation can not only be discussed in terms of its ecclesial meaning but also in its relation to culture as a whole. The issue of context and biblical interpretation becomes a serious matter of importance.
13. The Bible is a central document of Western civilization, not only as the source of Christian ideas but also as an influence upon education and culture. Today this is being seriously challenged as we question the “hermeneutical lens” we tend to use in interpreting Scripture. Further, the critical question is “Who is interpreting Scripture and for whom?”
14. Gerald West (2009), speaking into the South African context, makes the point that the Bible has always been at the centre of the liberation struggle even though it has been categorised as a tool of oppression. For example, it was used as the tool to build an apartheid South Africa but equally it was used as the key text of the struggling masses in South Africa for liberation and justice.

15. It is important to note that the ideological equation of the Bible with the Word of God has been seriously challenged by many scholars. Tinyiko Maluleke (1996), for example, states the following: "I propose that the equation of the Bible with the 'Word of God' is not only naïve but it is a dangerous form of naïveté. Furthermore, I propose that this equation has been and will continue to be more debilitating for Black African theologies than any of the dangers highlighted by Bediako, Sanneh, and Mugambi (1995) combined. The equation of colonialism with Christianity if and where it has occurred, has done far less harm to Black and African theologies than the equation of the Bible with the Word of God."
16. The above points establish the need for Reformed theology to seek renewal and transformation in the area of further understanding *sola scriptura*, the focus is not only on *what* the interpretation is but, more significantly, on "*who*" is interpreting. The Reformed faith has the obligation of protecting the text from being co-opted by the powerful and the elite and, thereby, giving vent and expression to the "voice" of the poor, marginalised and oppressed masses. How do the latter groups inform biblical interpretation? How can this become a source for renewal and transformation?
17. Essential to the Reformation is the doctrine of justification by faith alone: *sola fide*. The theme of "redemption through Christ" is central throughout the New Testament, Christian worship and Christian theology. The term "soteriology" is used in Christian theology to communicate the images which describe the redemption achieved through the death and resurrection of Christ. McGrath (2012) points out that there are five broad components to this network of ideas: images of victory, images of a changed legal status, images of changed personal relationships, images of liberation and images of restoration to wholeness. All of these images, no doubt, describe renewal and transformation.
18. It is not my intention here to get stuck in the theological debates of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is interesting to note that though there are differences in Luther's and Calvin's thought about this our joint Lutheran-Reformed dialogue have found that they are not significantly different; in essence they attempt to say the same thing.
19. My point of entry into this discussion for here is to mention that this doctrine provides for us a solid theological undergirding for renewal and transformation. The redemption of Christ through the cross and resurrection provides the basis for renewal and transformation. It is through this act that God in Christ makes all things new. Luther's focus on the *teologia crucis* makes this point abundantly clear.
20. The new theological emphasis on individual faith contributed to the growing influence of the new individualistic philosophy. The basic tenet of Protestantism was the doctrine that human beings were justified by faith rather than by works. Each person had to search his or her own heart to discover if acts stemmed from a pure heart and faith in God.
21. Unfortunately, the new theological focus on individual faith was to strongly influence the economic views of the new middle-class artisans and small merchants. Such people felt quite genuinely and strongly that their economic practices, though they might conflict with the traditional law of the old church, were not offensive to God. On the contrary: they glorified God.

22. The new doctrines stressed the necessity of doing well at one's earthly calling as the best way to please God, and emphasised diligence and hard work. These doctrines subsequently led to the spiritualising of economic processes and the belief that "God instituted the market and exchange." This emphasis, however, sadly took the Christian focus away from the general concern for the community and the obligation to the poor. It gave acceptance to the liberal paradigm: poverty as backwardness, stressing that the poor should be enabled to reach their full potential.
23. Although this view on poverty has been seriously debated and challenged over the years, we still need to assess how the Reformation relates to imperial capitalism and to the male means-end rationality in science, technology and individualistic calculating mentality (Duchrow 2015). How does this view of *sola fide* stand in need of renewal and reformation is a question we must continue to engage.
24. John Calvin's theology took the believer's responsibility in the world more seriously than Luther. His view on the *sovereignty of God* gave rise to the idea of mission as "extending the reign of Christ" both by inward spiritual renewal of individuals and by transforming the face of the earth through filling it with "the knowledge of the Lord." This particular view led Calvin into bringing about social transformation in Geneva.
25. It stressed the point of *covenantal theology* and laboured the fact that God covenants with all human beings and they are part of the human chain. Calvin employed the traditional organic metaphor for society (as found in Acts 2: 42ff), in which, as he wrote, no member has "power for itself nor applies it to its own private use, but each pours it out to the fellow members;" what chiefly matters is "the common advantage of the whole body" (Inst., 111, vii, 5). Occasionally he identified this community with the whole human race. "All people," he could maintain, "are bound together as a sacred chain ... [which] ...should be embraced in one feeling of love" (Commentary Acts 13:36; Inst., 11, viii, 55).
26. Consequently, it is not surprising that Calvin showed a particular concern for the poor which resulted in his attempt to transform his society, especially in Geneva. He concerned himself with the issues of commerce and economic justice. His theology was not disembodied, divorced from the realities of life where labourers and employers are often at odds over economic matters. Calvin realised that because of the nature of humanity and the sinfulness of all of our institutions, our endeavours are to some extent motivated by self-interest, pride, and greed. Yet his is a "world-affirming theology" in the sense that he sought to apply the gospel to all of life. For him, that meant seeking the guidance of scripture for the problems besetting humanity, particularly those besetting the citizens of Geneva.
27. Thus Calvin as a theologian and pastor became involved in everyday matters as diverse as the high cost of dying, hospitals, sumptuary laws, and the regulation of business and industry and the question of wages. Calvin and Farel instituted the first free public education for both sexes. Beyond the welfare system and education the work of Calvin and the pastors reached out to suggestions for railings to protect children on stairs and balconies. Fires and chimneys were regulated and efforts were made to clean the town and for street repair. Regulation of prices for the necessities of life was an accepted principle of the early Reformation in Geneva. Some today may not agree with or approve of

Calvin's stands, but they must admit that he regarded no area as too secular to be of legitimate Christian concern. The Reformers generally advocated an involvement with the world. However, unlike the Middle Ages, they went a step further to attempt to transform society.

28. Given the dynamics of a world in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer and the numbers of people living in poverty and hunger continues to increase, it is important for Reformed theology to make a clear commitment of standing with the poor and oppressed in the world. We need to shift from a "widow-dressing" theological approach to an in-depth involvement with the plight of the poor. We need to ask whether our theological positions are life-enhancing and life-affirming; do they follow the Bible in socio-historic precision, in essence, do they contribute to liberation and justice?
29. In addition, we need to reflect on the Reformation and its historical impact in view of the global threat to humanity and the Earth—both positively and negatively. We are living in difficult times as we experience climate change and witness the devastation of the earth. Reformed theology must awaken to a renewed sense of responding to our given realities and focus on the need of "caring for the earth."
30. The Accra Confession (2004) is a significant attempt in focusing theology on "covenanting and caring for the earth." It has outlined and prophetically engaged the issues of economic justice, gender justice and eco-justice. It has rightfully pointed us to these matters and prompted us to respond to the unjust realities of life. Now in this second decade of the Accra Confession we need to ask how this document can be a basis for renewal and transformation for ourselves as the WCRC and for the world at large. The refusal to do this is to not take seriously one of the significant tenets of Reformed theology: the reformed church is continually reforming.
31. This also impacts on our understanding of *Reformed spirituality*. Spirituality is the pattern by which we shape our lives in response to our experiences of God as a very real presence in and around us (Rice 1991). To be spiritual is to take seriously our consciousness of God's presence and to live in such a way that the presence of God is central in all that we do. Such spirituality turns to the world not away from it. It gives attention to the threats of life and embraces the need for justice.
32. Reformed spirituality is geared towards equipping life-giving transformative engagement in the world. It is a spirituality that is built in community and builds community. Thus, any piety that appears to be content with a personal relationship with Jesus, and which shuns or belittles the horizontal dimension of discipleship, is suspect. Any spirituality that advocates a withdrawal from what is going on in the world is contrary to Christ's spirit.
33. This concept of spirituality aligns well with the African concept of *Ubuntu* which says that "I am because of you." I belong therefore I am. This concept of community is needed to help shape and define our Communion. What does it mean to be a family together as we address diversity and differences? How can member churches hold up the quest for unity in the midst of differing views and theological interpretations? Our quest for renewal and transformation would certainly have to address such relevant questions.
34. At the centre of Reformed theology is the message of *sola gratia*. It reminds us that grace alone is the source and sustenance of our salvation. God's provision of saving, sustaining and glorifying grace is the golden thread uniting all Christian scripture and

enabling all Christian faithfulness. This means all works honouring God—including our personal sanctification, our love for neighbours and enemies, our zeal for world mission, our free offer of the Gospel, our warnings of judgement, our promises of eternity, our mercy toward the poor and oppressed, our stewardship of God's world, our battles against Satan, our prayer for God's blessing, and our work toward Christ's coming—all find proper motivation and enablement in love for Christ. Of course, this can be misused to use grace to excuse sin, but the principles of grace revealed in all Scripture are the fuel of personal holiness and spiritual revival for those led by the Spirit.

35. Thus, presenting the doctrines of grace in a warm and embracing way is not to obscure holy boldness but to encourage compassion and humility in the face of God's sovereign mercy to all he loves from every tribe, language, people and nation. As the kindness of God has led to repentance and renewal among us, we must be committed to a manner and ministry that reflects God's grace to others (cf. Romans 2:4; 1 Peter 3:15). We must be on guard that the grace message that God has brought to us (or our particular expression of it) does not become a jewel that we admire and adore for the joy it brings us rather than for the hope it offers the world.
36. The critical question is: How do we understand this concept of grace in the light of the new emerging world experiences impinging on the role of women in society, issues of human sexuality, interreligious encounters and tensions, racism, xenophobia, tribalism, the refugee situation, etc. How do we express grace and hospitality to differing views, theological beliefs and human experiences? All of these impress upon us the need for renewal and transformation as we seek to build inclusive communities and foster better relationships with people of other faiths. These are realities that the WCRC would have to deal with, and it is these that would hopefully bring theological renewal and transformation.

Contextual Renewal and Transformation

37. Whilst Reformed theology and tradition may have the same substance of faith and belief, as expressed above, it does not mean that it has the exact same impact in different contexts. Hence what is needed as a sign of renewal and transformation is a contextual reading and adaption of Reformed teaching and beliefs.
38. For example, in Africa we need to ask what value and significance the Reformed faith can have in the context of poverty, religious violence, civil factions, political instability and dictatorship. The ecumenical movement is called upon to play a very engaging role in bringing peace in Africa as it addresses the causes of religious, ethnic and xenophobic violence. There is a need for conversation with religions and ideologies—seeking to faithfully embody alternative ways of living together amidst the rise of religio-national fundamentalism, privatisation and market ideologies. This means that ecumenical organisations must give serious effort to work with people of other faiths and (even) of no faith. The ecumenical agenda needs to consciously create space for inter-religious dialogue, something we have not really given time to, at least in Africa.
39. Added to this is the issue of globalisation which has impacted on economic, political, cultural and religious spheres of society. These changes have many consequences. Migration, whether forced or voluntary, changes in family structures and economic,

ecological and social pressures have encouraged mobility which has created multiple social and religious identities. We have seen this impact on Europe especially in the past year. Previously the ecumenical movement did not need to address this. Now it must. These new realities are changing the world, churches and the way we engage ecumenism today. It is a call for renewal and transformation.

40. In South Africa, the ecumenical movement needs to visit afresh its work in the area of dealing with racism. It is quite evident that in South Africa today the quest for racial identity is becoming deeply entrenched. The dismantling of apartheid does not mean racism is gone. It is still with us and needs to be addressed by ecumenical organisations in South Africa with energy and intentionality. What renewal and transformation can Reformed theology and practice continue to bring in such a context given the fact that Reformed theology was used in the first place to support and justify apartheid? Since racism is becoming a worldwide problem, perhaps we need to put the Belhar Confession back on the table to provide the theological foundation to uphold human dignity, equality, justice, unity and reconciliation. This is especially appropriate as we celebrate 30 years since the launching of the Belhar Confession this year.
41. The executive committee meets here on this beautiful island of Cuba. The island was inhabited by various Mesoamerican cultures prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Since then Cuba became a Spanish colony. A series of rebellions during the 19th century failed to end Spanish rule. However, the Spanish-American War resulted in a Spanish withdrawal from Cuba in 1898, and the island gained formal independence in 1902 (en.m.wikipedia.org).
42. In the years following the independence Cuba saw economic development but faced political corruption and various struggles. During 1953-59 Fidel and Raul Castro Ruz led the Cuban Revolution which saw the rise of a socialist state by the Community Party led by the brothers. Unfortunately the country has been isolated by the United States since the revolution.
43. In spite of this embargo on Cuba, the country has managed to gain access to foreign commerce and travel and has made efforts to obtain diplomatic relationships with a number of other countries. Just last year Presidents Obama and Raul Castro opened the doors to dialogue, and this has led to limited trading opportunities. I am pleased to say that it all started at the funeral service of the late Mr. Nelson Mandela in December 2013 where both of them shook hands.
44. Further, President Obama made an official visit to Cuba on 20 March 2016, and with this the “old battle lines fade,” as it was captured by the *New York Times*. This was the first by a sitting American president since Calvin Coolidge. We have every reason to believe that this would open the gates for trade and prosperity for Cuba, but it also faces the danger of an American “takeover.” How do these new developments bring renewal and transformation to the people of Cuba?
45. The point I am trying to make here is that different contextual realities would need to inform and shape Reformed theology, faith and practice. We need to take cognisance of the fact that these contextual realities would embrace and emanate different expressions of Reformed theology, which can become a source for renewal and transformation.

Institutional Renewal and Transformation

46. It is clear that ecumenical organisations are struggling to survive financially, and commitment to ecumenism is dwindling. Whilst member churches are still keen to belong to say the WCRC, yet they are becoming less involved in the work of the organisation at the different levels. It's not because they have lost or are losing interest, it's just that they are becoming more absorbed with their own internal denominational life, struggles and issues.
47. Whilst saying what I have said above, I must make it very clear that, in my opinion, ecumenism is not dying but morphing into something new. For example, this is quite conspicuous in the formation of the South African Church Leaders' Indaba (SACLI) which encompasses most churches in South Africa. It does not function as an institutionally set up organisation but as a *network* of Christians working together for the transformation of society. The focus is not on organic unity but on creating a forum for Christians to come together to act on social issues. It is not a communion or *koinonia* but more of an alliance to demonstrate Christian unity and prophetic witness on particular issues. Invariably, there is no discussion on doctrinal issues; the focus is on common witness and service.
48. The WCRC is a communion, and rightly so, but we need to continue to network and work with other ecumenical organisations and NGOs in the endeavour to engage God's mission in the world. We need to take seriously our partnerships in the common interest of the "preferential option of the poor."
49. As we continue to embrace our future, and in the struggle for organic unity, we need to have before us this picture of an emerging ecumenism which calls us to engage the ecumenical discourse with the following understanding:
 1. We need to be less *institutional* and more *relational* as we network, develop partnerships and work with others in God's mission in the world. We need to give greater value to such partnerships as we seek to be where God is, among the poor, needy and oppressed.
 2. We need to realise that the new ecumenical space is not just with ecumenical organisations and church leaders but with ordinary Christians who are daily seeking to understand their faith in a world of conflict, struggle and suffering. Thus it deems it necessary for us to equip and empower the ecumenical "agents" in the pews and "market place." We have to follow the work of the Spirit to identify new areas where Christians are finding one another, often by working together to meet the needs of the wider community. What would this mean for future ecumenical vision and work?
 3. For example, in South Africa we have come to realise that true ecumenism is to be found in ordinary Christians and not just in church leaders. Conradie (2013) points out that in South Africa there seems to be a tension between grassroots ecumenical fellowship and national ecumenical structures. Ecumenism is alive and well in local communities throughout South Africa. Whilst maintaining their distinct denominational identities, lay Christians seem to have no problem in joining hands in prayer groups, marches, funerals, Bible study groups, community structures, governing bodies, soup kitchens, trade union meetings, etc. In many places, local ecumenical initiatives have contributed to a renewal of local congregational life and the unity of the church becomes a concrete reality. New impulses are also given

to regional, national, and international ecumenism by such local efforts. Here the focus is not on ecclesiology but on *mission*. The truth is that national ecumenical movements are being overtaken by reality and they cannot find the drive to keep in flow with the Spirit. This calls for radically re-thinking on how we do ecumenism today in the world. How can we in the WCRC use this to build our member churches, local churches, and regions? It seems to me that we need stronger regional structures if we are to truly impact our member churches. But equally member churches need to fully participate in these structures if we are to make it work.

4. We can no longer work as independent organisations and churches in ecumenical work; instead we must continue to foster interdependence, cooperation and collaboration. We have done well in our dialogues with the Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Pentecostals, but how do we take this further in the quest for unity in Christian witness, a testimony that the world needs to see. How do we strengthen our ties with the WCC, CWM, EKD, etc.?
5. We will need fresh expressions in thinking ecumenical theology as we consider the need for Christian unity and witness in the world. How do we address challenges which breed divisions, separation and distinctive identities? What do we say about confessions and creeds and its use in the quest for unity and mission? We will need to give considerations to these questions as we embrace a new vision for ecumenism and address the fragmentation of churches.
6. How do we address the deepest fault lines in ecumenical relationships as we address issues of ideologies especially in terms of race, ethnicity, subculture, class, gender and sexual orientation? These are issues that are dividing churches and creating disunity. Ecumenical organisations will have to address inclusion and exclusion. It will have to assess and reassess its endeavour of serving as an ecumenical platform and of providing a safe space for churches and Christians to share their differences on issues but are still able to remain a part of the Christian family.
7. As we consider issues of injustices, the need for security and peace in so many countries, religious factions and fundamentalism, civil wars, etc., we will need to give greater consideration to these in ecumenical dialogue and deliberation.

WCRC: Life and Work

President's visits and conferences

50. It was a joy and pleasure to visit member churches, general assemblies and special events and give addresses in different places throughout the past year. It was encouraging to know that many people still look to the WCRC for leadership, support and guidance on a number of issues. We have been called upon to help in a number of areas, especially with significant matters that are bringing huge challenges to our member churches, e.g. human sexuality, leadership struggles, peace initiatives, etc. We are, indeed, glad that we are able to assist and journey with our fellow members in some ways and, hopefully, helping to make a difference.

51. Among the many WCRC responsibilities that have kept me pretty busy in the past year I would like to mention some special events that took place. Chris and I were very pleased to participate in the *Ecumenical Forum on Peace of the Korean Peninsula in South Korea* (11-13 September 2015) and in the 100th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (14-17 September 2015). We played a key role in some of the addresses that were presented and noted the significant value and appreciation offered by our member churches there for the involvement of the WCRC. The situation is not very promising as it stands in spite of numerous attempts been made to bring about peace and reconciliation. It is fairly apparent that the WCRC would continue to offer its support to the peace process and we remain committed to the peaceful reconciliation of both South and North Korea.
52. I was privileged to participate in a very special consultation hosted by the Global Christian Forum on *Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom: Following Christ Together* which took place in Albania from 1-5 November 2015. The purpose of this gathering was to “amplify the voices of churches suffering discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom, to intensify solidarity with one another, and to envision concrete next steps together as the suffering church of Jesus Christ.”
53. I was pleased to moderate a group, offer input and preach the closing sermon at the consultation. This consultation drew together key ecumenical leaders from across the globe. It deliberated on the religious violence and persecution that was taking place around the world. We were deeply moved by the stories, especially in the Middle East, Nigeria and Sudan, among others, which spoke about the plight of Christians in these predominantly Muslim countries. The message below that came out of the consultation puts it all together very well:
 1. For the first time in the modern history of Christianity high level leaders and representatives of the various Church traditions gathered together to listen to, learn from, and stand with discriminated and persecuted Churches and Christians in the world today.
 2. This global gathering of 145 people took place from 2 – 4 November, 2015, in Tirana, Albania, a country that was declared by its constitution to be an atheist state in 1967, and now has flourishing churches in a framework of religious freedom even though some discrimination may remain.
 3. The Consultation, entitled *Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together*, was convened by the Global Christian Forum together with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Roman Catholic Church), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Evangelical Alliance, and the World Council of Churches. It was organized in close collaboration with the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, the Albanian Bishops’ Conference, and the Evangelical Alliance of Albania.
 4. We have come together because discrimination, persecution and martyrdom among Christians and people of other faiths in the contemporary world are growing due to a complex variety of factors in different realities and contexts.
 5. As we follow Christ, Christians can be exposed to any form of persecution, suffering and martyrdom, because the sinful world is against the Gospel of

salvation. But from earliest times Christians experienced the hope and reality of the Resurrection through walking the way of the Cross. Together we follow Christ as we “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6) for all.

6. The life of the Church for centuries has been a constant witness in two ways: the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, and the testimony through the shedding of the martyr’s blood. The 21st century is full of moving stories of faithful people who have paid for their dedication to Christ through suffering, torture and execution. Christian martyrs unite us in ways we can hardly imagine.
7. We acknowledge that solidarity among Christian churches is needed to strengthen Christian witness in the face of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom. In the 21st century, we need to urgently strengthen the solidarity of all Christians, following up on what has been accomplished with insight and discernment from this Consultation.
8. We repent of having at times persecuted each other and other religious communities in history, and ask forgiveness from each other and pray for new ways of following Christ together.

In communion with Christ we commit ourselves:

- (a) **To listen more** to the experiences of Christians, Churches, and of all those who are discriminated against and persecuted, and deepen our engagement with suffering communities.
 - (b) **To pray more** for Churches, Christians, and for all those suffering discrimination and persecution, as well as for the transformation of those who discriminate and persecute.
 - (c) **To speak up more** with respect and dignity, with a clear and strong voice together, on behalf of those who are suffering.
 - (d) **To do more** in mutual understanding to find effective ways of solidarity and support for healing, reconciliation, and for the religious freedom of all oppressed and persecuted people.
9. Listening to the experience of those going through challenging times, praying and discerning together ways of following Christ in these harsh realities, the Consultation calls on:
- (a) **All Christians** to include more prominently in their daily prayers those who are discriminated against, persecuted, and suffering for the fulfilment of God’s Kingdom.
 - (b) **All Christian organisations on regional, national and local levels** from various traditions to learn, pray and work together in their localities for the persecuted to ensure they are better supported.
 - (c) **All Churches** to engage more in dialogue and co-operation with other faith communities, and be “as wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16) by remaining vigilant, watchful and fearless in the face of discrimination and persecution.
 - (d) **All persecutors** who discriminate against and oppress Christians and violate human rights to cease their abuse, and to affirm the right of all human beings to life and dignity.
 - (e) **All governments** to respect and protect the freedom of religion and belief of all people as a fundamental human right. We also appeal to governments and international organisations to respect and protect Christians and all other people

of goodwill from threats and violence committed in the name of religion. In addition, we ask them to work for peace and reconciliation, to seek the settlement of on-going conflicts, and to stop the flow of arms, especially to violators of human rights.

- (f) **All media** to report in an appropriate and unbiased way on violations of religious freedom, including the discrimination and persecution of Christians as well as of other faith communities.
- (g) **All educational institutions** to develop opportunities and tools to teach young people in particular about human rights, religious tolerance, healing of memories and hostilities of the past, and peaceful means of conflict resolution and reconciliation.
- (h) **All people of goodwill** to work for justice, peace and development, knowing that poverty and disrespect of human dignity are major contributing factors to violence.

10. We recommend that the Global Christian Forum evaluates within two years the work of this event, and reports to all four bodies for their follow up.

- 54. The next Consultation is expected to possibly take place in Cuba. The WCRC is pleased to be a part of this initiative and we look forward to our continued participation in this process, especially given the fact that religious violence seems to be the norm of the day.
- 55. I was also greatly pleased to participate at a special consultation put in place in preparation for the Reformation celebrations in 2017. This “Twin–Consultation” on the theme of “*Reformation, Education and Transformation*” had its first meeting in Brazil in November 2015 and it would have a second follow-up consultation in May 2016 in Germany. It is a conversation among 100 delegates coming from Africa, Latin America, Asia, North America and Europe to focus “on how reformatory ideas work in different societal contexts and what role reformatory education programmes have in transformation processes.”
- 56. Participants are, from their particular perspectives, looking at what it means for reformatory Churches today to express social witness, find answers on how to contribute to ending human suffering and what an active theology of empowerment can accomplish. Discussions are focused on what it means to actively participate in democratisation processes, on taking a stand on political participation and alternative development concepts. It is intended to stimulate an exchange on how reformatory traditions relate to religious pluralism and/or secularisation, concepts of public theology and the liberation and transformation of education. Some of the important tracks covered at the consultation were: education, public theology, justice and reconciliation, contextually special forms in the different churches and the necessity to newly interpret and develop theological core issues.
- 57. I was delighted, in spite of my busy schedule, to be asked to present one of the keynote papers at the second consultation which takes place in Halle, Germany, 18-22 May 2016. I am looking forward to what comes out of this final consultation, especially its contribution to the Reformation Jubilee in 2017.
- 58. Chris and I were also pleased to be given an opportunity to present papers at a special theological colloquium hosted by the Council for World Mission in Bethlehem 28-31 October 2015. It focused on the theme *Mission in the Context of the Empire: A Call for Global Theological Resistance in Palestine*.

59. It is interesting to note that drawing from the Accra Confession's definition of empire, this theological colloquium was intended to "contribute to and revitalise global ecumenical biblical and theological reflection that questions any alliance with the colonial project of Empire." The statement from this colloquium can be found on the CWM website.
60. I was pleased to present a paper at the *Third Consultation on Economic, Social and Environmental Challenges* in Franschhoek, South Africa, in February 2016. This international consultation was hosted by the Ecumenical Institute of South Africa (EFSA), Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), Evangelische Akademie Tutzing, Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the University of Stellenbosch Business School. The theme of the consultation was *Leading Amidst Growing Ambiguities*. The consultation addressed the following sub-themes: economic development and social justice; challenges in ambiguities we are facing; business, ecology and sustainability and business and social justice. It was, indeed, a very thought-provoking consultation and many of the ideas that emerged from here could be shared with the NIEFA project. The documents from this gathering can be found on the EFSA website.
61. More recently, on 20 March 2016, I presented a keynote paper at the pre-assembly conference of the CWM Africa Region on the theme *Healing Relationships: hoping for a new spirituality*.
62. It was, indeed, a very full and busy year but an incredibly fruitful and rewarding one for the WCRC. Our participation and contributions to various events and meetings has stood us in good stead as an organisation that is frequently called upon to contribute to various things taking place around the globe. This significantly connects with my call at the last executive committee for the WCRC to take seriously the issue of visibility and adding value to what is going on in the world.
63. My role in facilitating the reunification process of the Dutch Reformed Church family in South Africa: URCSA, DRC, DRCSA and DRCA have been overtaken by certain events. The DRC did not succeed in obtaining the two thirds majority required to adopt the Belhar Confession within their church. However, there are numerous congregations and some synods that view it differently and have accepted and are using the Confession. In spite of this setback all four churches are participating in a process of writing an interim constitution that will help foster their relationships and work together. This is highly commendable.
64. The DRC decision on human sexuality at its last general synod has also created challenges within their church. Consequently, a lot of time and effort is put into addressing these challenges by the church leadership. My prayer and hope is that this would not overshadow or sideline the quest for unity and reconciliation and reunification. The URCSA general synod would be taking place later this year and this would be a crucial time of discerning the way forward. My prayer is that the desire for continuity in the process of reunification would be affirmed and sustained with diligence and effort.

WCRC vision, mission and strategic plan

65. In my 2014 address to the executive committee I pointed out that the WCRC must move from *Transition* to *Transformation*. Further, I stated that "since 2011 to 2013 we were quite occupied with issues related to finance, relocation and the movement

to Hannover. Whilst we may have succeeded in holding the fort during those trying times, it can be said that our work of delivery on our vision, mission and strategic direction, agreed upon in 2011, took a little bit of a dive and distraction. My view is that this current Executive must direct all its focus and energy on implementing this strategy as much as possible in the next two and a half years so that we have a very solid and formidable foundation to offer to the new Executive that would be appointed by the 2017 General Council.”

66. Allow me again to remind you of our vision and mission statements, values and key strategic directives. My repetition of this from my last report is intentional because I want to show how we have managed to redirect our initiatives in fulfilling some of our objectives and goals.

Vision

To live out the Communion of Reformed Churches, participating in God’s mission, that all may experience the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.

Mission

Drawing on the heritage of the Reformed confessions as a gift for the renewal of the whole church, the World Communion of Reformed Churches is committed to communion and justice and, in partnership with other ecumenical bodies and organizations, we participate in God’s mission in the world as we proclaim the saving grace and love of our Triune God by mutually working for: Christian unity and renewal in worship, theology and spirituality; justice; eradication of poverty; building right relations; integrity of creation; interfaith relations; reconciliation, healing, peace and the transformation of both churches and society.

Values

In a spirit of openness and transparency, and speaking the truth in love to ourselves and the world, we affirm the values described in Article IV of the WCRC Constitution:

- A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches strives to demonstrate and live the *oneness* in Christ we profess, to carry out its ministry in ways that *enable all member churches to share* their gifts, and to honour and be committed to God’s saving purposes for the transformation of the world. The World Communion of Reformed Churches serves its members with love and care, encouraging their mutual support and nurture of one another.
 - B. The World Communion of Reformed Churches in its order and actions is called to respect, defend, and advance the *dignity of every person*. In Jesus Christ all human differences must lose their power to divide. No one shall be disadvantaged for, among other reasons, race, ethnicity, or gender, and no individual or church may claim or exercise dominance over another.
 - C. The World Communion of Reformed Churches embraces *God’s covenant promises for the redemption, restoration and renewal of the whole creation* through Jesus Christ. In doing so, it affirms the biblical calling of the members to recognize the gift of baptism in one another, and the call to be unified in ministry, and together to bear witness to God’s justice and peace and to the integrity of creation.
1. The Executive also approved the following key strategic directions for the WCRC:

1. Key directions

- 1.1. The WCRC aims, by the end of 2017, to be known as a Communion that unites Reformed churches in God's mission in the world. Our internal relationships will evidence the oneness for which Jesus prayed. The WCRC will have significantly contributed to the world church's awareness of and ability to address theologically and practically, issues of justice, equality, reconciliation and peace-building. The WCRC will be the place to go for theological and practical resources on these issues. The WCRC will be an interwoven network committed to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world, and will be widely acknowledged as an effective convener of significant training and resourcing for leaders and future leaders so that they may contribute theologically and practically to the mission of the member churches. The core of the network will be sustainable with core functions funded with revenue from member churches. The WCRC, at every level, embarks on this journey using the following key directions (not in rank order):

1.1.1. *Mission*

The WCRC is called into God's holistic mission and commissioned to seek new ways of engaging in mission. As a communion, the WCRC strengthens doing mission in unity and stimulates reflections that make our churches' mission effective and relevant to the 21st century. The call to proclaim the saving grace and love of the triune God and to be God's agents of transformation in the world places mission at the heart of everything the WCRC and its member churches do.

1.1.2. *Communion*

The WCRC is deeply committed to the life of the whole Communion. As a Communion the WCRC is based on the understanding of *koinonia*. Jesus Christ has revealed that *koinonia* is the reality of the participation of his sisters and brothers in his body. This reality is clearly visible in our life when we share bread and wine at Christ's table, when in fact we share the body and blood of Christ, and when through this *koinonia* "all kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged". Therefore the WCRC affirms that there can be no communion without justice and no justice without communion. Any separation between the call to communion and the commitment to justice would ignore the basis of *koinonia*. And so we affirm the gifts of unity in Christ through a full communion where all of our churches recognize each other's baptism, invite one another to the table, and affirm the integrity of one another's ministry.

1.1.3. *Justice*

The WCRC will actively engage in biblically and theologically grounded justice and be aware of its implications. This includes building right relations among all people, justice in the economy and the earth, economic justice, eradication of poverty, gender justice, integrity of creation, reconciliation, interfaith engagement, healing, and working towards the transformation of both churches and society. The theological self-understanding of who we are as a Communion undergirds the commitment to being a prophetic voice for justice on the part of the WCRC and its member churches and regional councils.

1.1.4. *Theology*

The WCRC envisages bringing together seminaries, theologians, leaders and potential leaders from different contexts, to find, within and beyond the WCRC, fresh understandings of Reformed theology and new expressions of Reformed identity, doing what we can together, and drawing on the resources of theological centres and

individuals. The WCRC intends to knead its values and beliefs into the dough of the church, doing contextual theology to reflect current realities.

1.1.5. *Ecumenical Engagement*

Called to be part of God's wider family working with others in response to the line in the high priestly prayer "... that they may be one", the WCRC is committed to working closely with other ecumenical bodies, as well as in commissions and dialogues with other world communions as expressions of this key direction. Our understanding of being in communion is both for the Reformed family and for the whole church. To be Reformed is to be ecumenical; therefore the WCRC will continue to be engaged actively in endeavours that foster Christian unity and ecumenical mission."

67. Since our last executive committee meeting in 2015, I have worked with the general secretary, staff and officers to focus on our key directives. It became pretty obvious that we needed to pinpoint certain key activities and focus on these in 2016 and 2017. I am pleased to inform you that we were able to identify some priorities within our five directives to ensure a more realistic, effective and efficient delivery of our plans. Whilst all our other work and programmes would continue, priority would be given to the things we have identified to be essential for the 2017 General Council.
68. The general secretary would address our revised strategic plan for 2016-2017 in his report or that of the officers' report, so it is not my intention to say much more now. However, I like to point out that some of the things we have identified are very relevant and significant for our times. These, no doubt, are issues that will surface or re-surface at the 2017 General Council. More significantly, they are matters that our member churches and regions wrestle with on a daily basis, in some places, that need to be addressed with caution, care and significance.
69. What are some of those issues? To name a few: Religious violence is very serious and our programme *Mission on the Frontlines* addresses this; the issue of human sexuality is seriously dividing churches and some of our member churches continue to bear the harsh repercussions in response to decisions they have taken on this matter. Hence we propose to have a consultation on "communion and human sexuality." Our focus is not on taking a position on this complex topic but to discuss the (dis)unity it is causing among member churches and ascertain how we can still keep our eyes fixed on unity and communion in spite of differences.
70. Our *regions* need to be more properly organised and empowered. We plan to have a consultation to work at this so that we could present a more strong regional operation to the 2017 General Council.
71. Another significant issue that would be raised at this executive committee meeting is the proposal for a *Declaration on the Ordination of Women*. The 2010 Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids took a decision that opted for the equal participation and numbers of women at the council and on the executive committee from 2017. This is going to be a challenge but we are working on it. Of course, one of the best ways to address this is to increase the participation of women in the highest leadership level of member churches. This is really hard to do from where we sit as the WCRC because member churches have their own views, life and structures and, in short, we cannot tell them what to do. However, if we are going to be true to the decision we took in 2010 then something radical and binding has to emerge concerning the ordination of women. In fact, this was already said by decision of the

2010 Uniting General Council which called for this to be “binding” on the WCRC. The task group commissioned to work on this by our executive secretary for justice and partnership found it necessary to call for a “Declaration on the Ordination of Women” as a serious measure in moving forward on this matter. I know that this may not go down well with some of our member churches who still do not ordain women in ministry. However, it is a road we must travel if we are to remain true to what we believe as a Communion. Dora will raise this subject in her report.

72. Plans are afoot, and not without struggle, to take our conversations with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification further in our 2017 General Council so that it is not merely relegated to the shelves of history but become meaningfully expressed in lived-out Christian unity. We are hoping that our Reformed-Lutheran conversation would pave the way for something like a “Wittenberg Declaration” in which we reflect our commitment to unity. This endeavour has resulted in some complexities, but the desire to achieve this is there among the Lutherans and us. The general secretary would say more about this. My intention in giving it a mention is to express my support for such initiatives, hoping that you would support it, too.
73. The WCRC has really taken its *ecumenical engagement* to greater levels as we work with other ecumenical organisations in addressing pertinent global and regional issues. The general secretary would report on this and on his involvement in representing the WCRC. I am pleased to observe that the WCRC is becoming a “go to” organisation on some of these issues, of course, always in participation with other ecumenical bodies.
74. Personally, I feel very positive about our strategic plan for 2016-2017. I sense that our focused work with these priorities in mind, among the other things we continue to do, will enable us to deliver a very strong and forward-looking WCRC to the 2017 General Council. Indeed, we are pressing the right buttons as we tackle some of the real issues and challenges facing the world and our churches today. It is important to be relevant and to make a difference; to struggle with the struggles of life.
75. In our 2015 executive committee meeting in Lebanon I said, “it is my desire and intention to bring us back to these objectives (of the WCRC) with more deliberate effort and focus. This should be the focus of this Executive Committee as well.” I am pleased to report that, in keeping with our vision and key strategic direction indicated earlier, we are on track and target. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the general secretary, staff and officers for their work and efforts to this end.

Matters from Previous Executive Committee Meeting

2017 General Council

76. At our last meeting deep concern and anxiety was expressed at what was perceived as the lateness and staggering on our plans for the 2017 General Council. I am pleased to report that our plans are well intact and quite advanced in progress in virtually all respects. We need to finalise some details with regards to speakers, etc. but there are fruitful discussions on this matter. Adequate time has been allocated on our agenda for the presentation of the report of the general council planning committee and ensuing discussions so it is not my aim to say anything more about

this, except to reassure the executive committee that the general council planning committee and staff, especially Hans Lessing now our full-time co-ordinator, are well on top of things. Also, the local planning committee is doing a great piece of work and the worship committee has been meeting and advancing well in their preparations. We are really grateful to all our folks who are assisting the preparations in various ways. Indeed, God bless you all!

Discernment/Consensus Model

77. The general council planning committee has proposed that we use the consensus/discernment model in making decisions in its full form and depth. This is not new to us. I am told that it has been used since the general council in Accra in 2004. We also used it at the 2010 Uniting General Council. We have partially used this in some of our executive committee meetings with the use of the orange and blue cards. We did not use it in Lebanon.
78. Since it is proposed that we use this model in 2017 we thought it might be wise to put it into operation at this executive committee meeting so that we fully acquaint ourselves with its use. Hence our meeting has been structured around the use of this model. There are three main stages to this model: *1) Listening, 2) Dialogue and 3) Decision*. In the first stage we merely listen to the presentation of the report and may have questions for clarity. The reports are then taken to a number of small groups meeting concurrently for dialogue and discussion on the proposals, if there are any. The small group is allowed to amend the proposals or to even add new ones as long as they relate to the subject under discussion. These proposals are then passed on to a drafting committee that is tasked to take the various comments from the small groups into consideration and come up with a “consolidated” proposal/s. These are then brought to the decision session that is usually the next day.
79. The consensus/discernment model usually takes time and is better used in a big gathering that allows virtually all the participants/delegates to contribute to the decision-making process, an ideal mechanism for the general council. People who do not prefer to speak in public are empowered to speak in the small groups. The moderators/facilitators of these groups are trained to encourage free and protected participation of all members of the group and not just the vocal few. In this sense people go away feeling that they have been heard. This is what we would wish to achieve at the general council. Of course, we will have to suitably adapt the model for our purpose at the general council, as we will do at this executive committee meeting. At the council we would face further challenges to accommodate language and diversity but there are experienced people to assist us with these.

Staff matters

80. The 2015 executive committee meeting also spent a great amount of time discussing issues related to the staff in Hannover. Concerns were expressed about work performance, relationships between members of staff and other related matters. I am pleased to report that I have worked very closely with the general secretary on these matters and he was able to engage the services of a professional person to come in and help with staff-related issues. She took them through team building

exercises and individual and group sessions which helped to build relationships. I am pleased to report that the situation is so much better now even though some things are still being worked on. On certain visits to the office for other meetings I managed to meet individually with staff members and offer personal words of support and encouragement to them in their work. The general secretary has cut down on his travels, spending more time in the office building cohesion, relationships of staff and management structures. As a matter of courtesy he discusses all his travel plans with me so that I am fully acquainted with his diary in this respect. In addition to office management and administration, I wish to acknowledge that travel is part and parcel to his work in building the Communion.

81. As far as the staff is concerned, we are sorry to hear that Douwe is forced to undergo surgery on both his knees and this, effectively, would put him out of work for six months or more. We wish him well and pray God's healing and sustaining presence over him at this time. Obviously, this would create a great sense of concern about his work in the area of Theology, Mission and Communion, especially as we prepare for the 2017 General Council. Given the work load and responsibilities assigned to these areas, it is expected that we should engage the services of others to help with the main tasks that needs to be delivered. The general secretary has been in discussions with Douwe about this, and there are ideas about how to proceed to cater for the work that needs to be done during Douwe's confinement and recovery.
82. I have not reflected much on the work of the executive secretaries in this report but the general secretary would cover this in his report, as will the executive secretaries themselves. I wish to thank them for their work in the past year.

Finance

83. As far as our financial situation is concerned, I am pleased to report that much has been done to provide the WCRC with a more financially stable environment. Whilst we rejoice that this is the case, we cannot become relaxed because we need to consider the financial stability of the organisation beyond 2017. We did have a bit of a scare with additional costs to our pension fund, but thanks to the generosity of some of our member churches and others we were able to raise most of the 250,000 euro that was needed to cover the deficit.
84. We are, indeed, grateful to our German churches for their generous contributions which have done an enormous amount of good to sustain the WCRC financially. However, we must not become comfortable with this because such commitments have their own challenges and timelines. It is important that we look at other possibilities of fund raising and financial self-sustainability. The last executive committee meeting appointed a funds development and sustainability committee to look into these matters. We have struggled to find the right people to take us forward in this regard but we must not give up. It is absolutely imperative that we develop the necessary measures to make the WCRC financially sustainable, noting that membership contributions are not solely adequate for this task.
85. Whilst talking about finance, I must say how thankful we are to know that we have virtually received all the money for our budget for the 2017 General Council. We are most grateful to our General Treasurer, Johann Weusmann, for his incredible work in raising these funds and all others who contributed to this endeavour. It is really

encouraging to know that we are going into this general council having the necessary resources we need to make it happen.

86. I wish to express my sincere thanks to Johann, Gerhard, Anna, Chris and the finance committee for their superb work in both raising and managing our finances. My prayer and hope is that this would be an on-going trend for the WCRC.

Thanks and appreciation

87. There are many people who keep the WCRC wheels turning at the different levels of the organisational structure from the officers, executive committee, and global office, regions, member churches and committees. I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to everyone concerned for all their work and effort in keeping the WCRC alive and at work in many places around the world.
88. I wish to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Chris Ferguson (general secretary), the executive secretaries: Douwe Visser, Dora Valentin Arce, Phil Tanis; all the financial and supporting staff and interns: Claudia Duval (who has now left us), Katrina Mertz, Anna Krüger, Werner Joecker, Paul Oppenheim, Emelda Ndipewah, Amritha Perumalla, Joanna Hipp and Fundiswa Kobo. May God continue to bless and sustain them as they serve the WCRC in their respective and various capacities.
89. I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratefulness to the officers for their constant journey, wisdom, support and encouragement. We have had some challenging moments but they have hung in there strong and well. I appreciate the time and effort they make to connect via Skype throughout the year and the fruitful and thoughtful contributions they make to our conversations. May God bless and keep each of you in joy, peace and good health.
90. We are truly blessed to have the kind of members we have who serve on the executive committee. Thank you for your deep interest in the well-being and work of the WCRC. As I have previously said, it is important that you are always in the communication loop but, more significantly, it is vital that your role with the WCRC is not only at the executive meeting. We each need to be out there as the hands, feet, voices and representatives of the WCRC. We are ambassadors of the organisation on the ground where we need to be felt most. Thank you for your continued work and service.
91. I wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all our volunteers, people who work in the different regions, serve on various committees, attend and contribute to our programmes and conversations and bless us in a variety of ways. It is they who sustain the life and work of the WCRC on the ground, where it matters most.
92. I would like to recognize with joyful thanksgiving the many organisations and churches that generously and graciously support our work and programmes with financial and other resources, not forgetting particularly the Council for World Mission (CWM) and the German churches that support our programmes and projects. Again a special thanks to all those who contributed so graciously to the fund raising initiatives for the 2017 General Council.
93. Finally, I wish to thank my family for their patience, support and love. My wife, Sandra, and children have been extremely understanding and supportive given my different roles in the WCRC, the University of Pretoria and the UPCSA. Equally, I like

to acknowledge and thank your loved ones for their support to you and for the work of the WCRC.

Summary and Conclusion

94. The cross and the resurrection speak of renewal and transformation. In this address, I have outlined the need for renewal and transformation of the WCRC on at least three levels: theological, contextual and institutional. We need to embrace a greater and deeper vision of these as we continue to pursue our work and witness as an organisation. Our efforts of renewing and transforming the world must start with us if we are to earn respect and remain relevant in addressing the challenges in a changing world. This would also require challenging some of our member churches in certain areas as we continue to proclaim unity, justice and peace.
95. We have revisited the vision and key strategic directives of the WCRC and suggested ways in which we can gather momentum as we move towards the 2017 General Council. We have identified some of the “big issues” that would surface at the general council and directed our work and delivery towards this end. In each of our five key directives we have outlined one or more things that need to be done. It is hoped that through this endeavour we would leave a very strong and focused WCRC for the next elected leadership in 2017.
96. The past year has been a really remarkable and productive one. In spite of our challenges we have successfully managed to steer our way to getting on track for the upcoming 2017 General Council. Whilst there are some things that still need to be worked through and sorted out, we have managed to gain a good degree of stability in our global office in comparison to the previous year. Among the other programmes and projects managed by our staff, they are now giving priority to the priorities identified by the officers in the revised strategic plan.
97. Our preparations for the 2017 General Council are well advanced with all aspects being addressed and adequately dealt with. Of major significance is the fact that we have managed to raise most of the money required to host the general council. We rejoice in this good news and we thank both God and all those who assisted to raise funds to make this possible.
98. Our financial situation is quite stable as we move into the next general council, and we are absolutely thankful to all those who worked tirelessly to make this possible. However, I am concerned about what happens beyond 2017. We need to continue to have a vision for financial sustainability for the WCRC and more effort needs to be devoted to this end.
99. This next year is going to be a very busy one for all of us as we prepare for the 2017 General Council. I trust that you all, in whatever capacity, would do your best to make it a very successful year and a very enjoyable general council. Remember that to those whom much is given much more is required. God bless!
100. Our thanks and appreciation to the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Cuba and all our friends for their warm hospitality and service to us during our stay on this beautiful island during this executive committee meeting. God bless you all!