

**LIVING GOD
RENEW AND
TRANSFORM US**

2010-2017
From Grand Rapids to Leipzig
**General Council
2017**



World Communion
of Reformed Churches

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General Council 2017

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New beginnings can be filled with joy and challenges.

In 2010 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) joined to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Those of us who were at that Uniting General Council (UGC) can attest to the fact that it was, indeed, a joyful and most welcomed celebration. It was absolutely fabulous to see these two organizations join together in their common mission and witness to Jesus Christ in the world. It was a closer affirmation of the prayer Jesus offered in John 17:21: “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

In my travels around the WCRC family during the past seven years I can confidently say that we have learnt what it means to be one family. Whilst the WARC and REC divide may still be prevalent in one or two places yet in most it apparently does not exist. We are truly grateful that we have been able to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Led by the mandate that emerged from the UGC—*Called to Communion and Committed to Justice*—we were able to direct work of the WCRC over the past seven years. Immediately after the UGC we set to work on drawing up a new Vision, Mission and Values Statement together with five key directives to guide the work of the WCRC. The key directives are: mission, communion, justice, theology and ecumenical engagement. This booklet offers substantial details about the work done (or not done), in this respect, since Grand Rapids in 2010.

The WCRC also faced numerous challenges over the past years. Much of these can be attributed to financial constraints which resulted in the relocation of the WCRC Global Office to Hannover, Germany. The whole issue of relocation, changes in staff, adjusting to a new environment and continuing our work with partner ecumenical organizations all presented further challenges. Nevertheless, by God’s grace and the kind support of many people, staff and organizations, the WCRC comes to this General Council in Leipzig as a stable, sound and steady organization ably positioned to continue its work of impacting the world with the love, grace, peace and justice of our Lord, Jesus Christ.



President Jerry Pillay preaches at the Evangelical Reformed Church in Celle, Germany, during the 2014 Executive Committee meeting.

As our story in this narrative would show, we continue to make strides as we work with others in the call to communion (unity) and justice in a broken and struggling world. Our work has evolved into a place of high recognition and great appreciation by member churches and partner organizations.

This General Council meets in the year in which we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Martin Luther Reformation. We have chosen as our theme: "Living God, renew and transform us." May this be the prayer of the WCRC family as we move forward into the years to come guided by God's wisdom and grace, as we strive for justice and peace in the world.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry Pillay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "P".

Jerry Pillay
WCRC President



Building a Communion called to justice, beset by challenges, filled with hope!

By General Secretary Chris Ferguson

This report follows the tradition of charting the activities and life of the World Communion of Reformed Churches through the metaphor of a journey from one General Council to the next.

The 2010 Uniting General Council (UGC) represented more than bringing two global organizations from the Reformed tradition together. That would have been more than enough of a challenge to last seven years! More profoundly the UGC embraced a new and deeply theological self-understanding of the WCRC as a communion, a *KOINONIA* or fellowship of churches in communion with each other and as a community living out the gift of “the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,” called to justice in the full sense, lifted up in the Accra and Belhar confessions and in the long and rich history of the biblical jubilee-prophetic tradition as incarnated in the life and ministry of Jesus, gifted to the church through the Holy Spirit and central to the traditions of the churches of the Reformation(s).

These pages record the highlights of the journey of a Communion “under construction,” a work in progress beset by challenging times in the life of the world that God loves. It is a pretty inspiring story, one that although I have the privilege of presenting here, reflects the work, vision and ministry of the Executive Committee, regional councils, networks, member churches and officers of the WCRC, especially the leadership of President Jerry Pillay and General Secretary (until September 2014) Setri Nyomi. My own direct involvement in this journey only begins at the end in late 2014, and yet it is my honour to outline the hard work of moving towards being a Communion.

The Consultation on Communion held in 2014 clearly described the truth of our unity as God's gift to us and at the same time the long path we must take to make such unity a full reality as a Communion committed to justice among and between us.

The UGC set out an impressive vision and agenda for the future—both very broad and very ambitious. The newly elected Executive Committee acted quickly to translate the UGC's vision into a strategic plan adopted in 2011. The plan articulated the constitutional mandate and UGC vision as: "to live out the Communion of Reformed Churches, participating in God's mission, that all may experience the fullness of life in Jesus Christ." The mission of the WCRC was stated as:

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 organisations, 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. (2011 Executive Committee Minutes)

In living out the vision, mission and Reformation-rooted faith and values the plan outlined five strategic or "key" directions in order to arrive at strategic aims for the seven years until the next General Council, which were expressed as:

To be known as a Communion that unites Reformed churches in God's mission in the world. Our international 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 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 func-

tions funded with revenue from member churches. The WCRC, at every level, embarks on this journey using the following key directions:

- Mission
 - Communion
 - Justice
 - Theology
 - Ecumenical Engagement
- (2011 Executive Committee Minutes)

This was an extremely ambitious agenda that firmly marked the working style and distinctive identity markers for the journey: no communion without justice, no justice without communion, a Reformed church always reforming, committed to ecumenical engagement and rooted in networks and the regions of the WCRC where the core activities are sustained by member contributions (see chapter 1 for more details).



*General Secretary
Chris Ferguson addresses
the 35th Synod of the
Church of South India
in 2017.*

This communion-building and justice-witnessing journey soon faced considerable challenges in terms of financial sustainability. In order to ensure that core functions were supported by the members and as a part of building a vision of a just and participatory Communion a fair contributions formula was adopted (details of the financial situation and the relationship between member contributions and the overall core budget are in chapter 8). Even while a new and fairer approach to membership contributions coupled with modernizing the database and an intensified approach to member church relations has increased and improved member church contributions overall the core budget has never reached the point of being fully sustained by member contributions alone. In the years from 2010 to 2012 this reached near crisis proportions when coupled with external factors such as global financial and economic crises, fluctuating currency exchange rates, the high cost of living in Geneva and the resulting shrinking resources of some key contributing churches. The new financial contribution formula foresaw large increases from larger churches, but the pressures of shrinking resources and declining membership and denominational funding patterns meant that this large increase did not materialize.

The financial challenges were so severe that despite giving the programme work on justice the highest priority it was impossible to find sufficient resources from the core budget to replace the outgoing executive secretary for justice in a fulltime capacity living in Geneva. A temporary solution was put in place with Dora Arce-Valentin working as a consultant from Cuba for a year until sufficient funds were raised through partner contributions to allow her to take up a regular appointment in Geneva. However this situation showed that the financial situation was not sustainable and that major changes were necessary in order to be in a position to move forward with the strategic plan and maintain the vision of the WCRC.

The Executive Committee undertook very important steps to address fundraising and resource development. This included appointing a volunteer director of development and entering into a new partnership understanding with the Council for World Mission (CWM). The agreement with CWM resulted in a very generous and important endowment gift of 1,000,000 British pounds, originally to be used to attract other donations towards a 10,000,000 pound endowment fund.



The late Salome Twum, Lin Wan-Jou, Ofelia Ortega and Veronica Muchiri at the First Presbyterian Reformed Church in Havana, Cuba, during the 2016 Executive Committee meeting.

This was one of several significant donations that helped rebuild the WCRC's depleted reserves, along with equally generous contributions from German churches, most notably the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK). While this helped restore donor confidence in the viability and sustainability of the WCRC, the original concept of a major capital campaign to raise a large endowment fund was found to be not implementable. The director of development position was not continued. The fundraising approach has been re-directed to more regionally-based, contextual approaches given that the endowment fund plan was simply deemed not feasible at this time in this economic climate with our particular donor base.

Given the continuing budgetary challenges, it was decided to consider moving the WCRC out of Geneva in order to reduce costs, increase economic stability and achieve long-term sustainability. The decision after study, consultation and debate was to move to Hannover, Germany. The offices have been functioning in Hannover since January 2014 (see chapter 7 for more information on this process). It must be said that from a financial perspective the move to Hannover has meant that the worst of the financial crisis is behind us, and that if we had not moved it is almost certain that the WCRC would have been bankrupt and unable to sustain its programmes. Today the situation is relatively stable, although not without important challenges in meeting the core budget through membership fees (details can be found in chapter 8).

The decision to move, for all its positive outcomes, also had a very large impact on the capacity of the WCRC to live out its ambitious strategic plan. The move impacted heavily the staff with significant personnel changes, and in addition the perhaps obvious destabilizing effect of the move on the capacity to effectively run programmes while involved in the time-consuming, complicated and distracting business of moving offices from one country to another and adapting to another culture and language. The impact on institutional memory and infrastructure was great. It was just in 2016 that the database, financial and administrative structures were fully in place and operational.

The ecumenical impact was also significant. The move from the Ecumenical Centre was interpreted by some as a kind of move away from ecumenical participation. Both symbolically and practically we were perceived as now being less visible, less accessible and less involved even as we made great efforts to show this was not so. Even within our own Communion many still ask where our offices are or continue to send mail to Geneva! There was a questioning by some as to why we did not move to the global south where the majority of our member churches are located. The impacts of the move both real and perceived has indeed, as noted by our President Jerry Pillay, distracted us from the implementation of the strategic plan. However, it was a necessary part of the journey, and the positive impacts did leave us ready to be effective in the last period before General Council—the work of which was presented to and endorsed by the 2016 Executive Committee in a “final phase” addendum to the 2011 strategic plan.

The other factor impacting the smooth implementation of the vision from the UGC, added to finances, the move and resulting impacts, was the change in leadership. As early as May 2012 the Executive Committee established the process for the election of a new general secretary as the incumbent Setri Nyomi would be completing his second term by 1 April 2014. In fact the search and selection process stretched out over the full two years and three rounds of candidates and was completed in May 2014. Setri was prevailed upon to continue for an additional five months until I was elected in May 2014 and took up office in September of that year.

The Communion committed to justice found itself thrust into a long period of transition and changes in response to the financial crises, the decision to re-locate and the search for new leadership. The process of relocation always takes time and effort. The staff and Executive Committee made significant if not heroic efforts to correct problems, adapt to new challenges and overcome obstacles and still run a full range of effective programmes, achieve relative financial stability, put in place effective operating systems and reach out to the ecumenical community and member churches to restore confidence and build communion while witnessing to justice and peace.

The chapters that follow outline the work over the years in keeping with the key directions mentioned above. With or without the significant challenges faced by the WCRC it is an impressive testimony to a communion in construction.

The journey reported in these pages is one of moving from a vision of “Unity in the Spirit in the Bond of Peace” as a Communion committed to justice to embracing the historic moment of commemorating 500 years (and more) of Protestant Reformation(s) for the renewal of the church for the transformation of the world. The WCRC faced unforeseen challenges but through God’s grace and leading of the Spirit the witness to unity and justice in our following of Jesus shines through.



1

New Beginning

New Beginning

The General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches officially met for the first time in 2010, for it was then that the Reformed Ecumenical Council came together with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches at the Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. The WCRC was a new creation, representing 80 million Christians in 108 countries. The two ecumenical agencies, both with deep roots, knew that they could do more together, and the union filled the organization with renewed hope and energy for the work of the church.

The vision of the new organization was “to live out the Communion of Reformed churches, participating in God’s mission, that all may experience the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.” The new mission, redefined in 2011, called the Communion to:

- 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

The theme followed since the UGC in Grand Rapids—Called to Communion, Committed to Justice—was a bold and unifying testament to the new mission and vision.

Strategic Plan

Building on the energy generated by the UGC, the Executive Committee immediately embarked on the development of a strategic plan that would guide the organization until its next General Council in 2017. Adopted at the 2011 Executive Committee meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, the plan affirmed the three values described in the WCRC Constitution:

1. 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



Mary Fontaine, the late Salome Twum, Kobus Gerber, Lydia Adajawah, Yael Hadiputeri and Ebed Yosua Lamorahan outside the National Evangelical Church of Beirut during the 2015 Executive Committee meeting.

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.

2. 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.
3. 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.

Five key directions were set to carry forth the work of the WCRC:

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.

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."¹ 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

¹ Lima text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry



Béla Nagy, of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia, shares bread from their community kitchen in Beregszász (Berehove), Ukraine.

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.

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.

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.

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.

These five key directions would be implemented through "renewed ways of working" and "fresh methodologies to serve the whole communion: regional bodies, national churches, and with a particular eye toward relating to local congregations. The aim is to incarnate our beliefs, so that our methodologies are the expressions of our values."

These methodologies included:

A. Networking

Networking is vital for effective communication, mutual enrichment, and for equipping and empowering local churches and the regional councils; all of which is required if we are to become a true communion. Resources of member churches can be made available to the whole. The WCRC secretariat can serve as a clearing house that puts regions and member churches in touch with each other. The staff of the global secretariat should contribute in broad programmatic areas. The WCRC will develop and use the communication and networking capacities of the global secretariat and regional councils to engage in such a way that the WCRC resources go to both member churches and through them their local congregations.

B. Leadership Development

Leadership Development is essential for integrating the values, learnings and work of the communion into the life of the Church, and so to build the capacity of the member churches as well as the whole communion. This is also an important element in sourcing theological, advocacy and other practical resources we need to relate to each other. As a communion, the WCRC will mature by incarnating the values it espouses. Developing the leadership of the WCRC includes accompaniment and continued development of existing leaders, developing mentoring and other servant leadership instincts in them, while paying attention to youth empowerment, gender justice, and the inclusion of those with disabilities. Development of leaders involves inspiring leaders with vision to engage with and learn from the broader ecumenical movement, while integrating the mission and values of the WCRC into all that they do.

C. Regional Engagement and Empowerment

Regional Engagement and Empowerment is essential to building the theological groundwork and implementing the WCRC vision, mission and actions (that includes reflection and aspirations for action) in order to embed the WCRC experience in the real experience and context of regions. Efforts will be made to ensure Regions are adequately funded to participate in the whole. Regions will be encouraged to establish regional councils where they don't exist. Where possible, this should be done in partnership. There are also particular needs, resources and skills in the regions that can be mutually enriching. We need a process of dialogue among Executive Committee, staff and the regions in living out the communion.

D. Sharing Resources and Ensuring Adequate Funding of the Whole

To strengthen our communion, we need to ensure that all are contributing, and that resources are shared equitably and invested well: fruitfully and ethically. This includes financial, human and other resources. While the resources exist for the WCRC to be the communion God wants us to be, resources need to be identified and accessed for the life and work of the communion. As a family the WCRC needs to be sharing resources with each other, and to be creating a culture of sharing. „Where our treasure is, our heart will be also“, therefore every part of the communion should be strongly encouraged to contribute financially as well as in other valuable ways.

E. Communication

The WCRC's ability to live out God's mission, true Communion and Justice, and to develop leaders, networks, regions and sharing, requires us to develop communication channels and reflexes. These need not all be centralised, and indeed must not be exclusively dependent on the secretariat. The whole Communion in every part of the globe receives its life and energy from God, and so each part has something to offer, something to share with, and something to receive from, the rest of the body. The WRC has the opportunity to use new and developing technologies to communicate. The WCRC will invest in doing this well, being aware that not all have the same access to these technologies.

F. Partnership

The WCRC will strengthen partnership both as methodology and as engagement in our work. We are not alone. The WCRC values its partnership with church, ecumenical and mission bodies as well as movements with which it shares common aims and commitments. This includes ecumenical and social justice movements working with common values and goals with the WCRC. We understand that we are better together. The WCRC therefore builds effective relationships with our ecumenical and regional partners and institutions. The WCRC also builds working relationships around thematic issues (e.g. mission, church renewal, water, food, trade, justice, communications, and other critical issues facing communities.) In attempting anything new, we will first explore the possibility of partnership.

The strategic plan concluded with setting priorities to fulfill the five key programme priorities through the methodologies. In setting the priorities, the Executive Committee noted that the WCRC needed to “focus on what the organization as a whole can do and do well within our resources. ...The priorities...take into account what is possible to be facilitated through the WCRC Secretariat working with the regions given human and financial resources available.”

While the Executive Committee regularly tracked the organization’s progress through the framework of the strategic plan it reviewed the entire plan in 2016, and, based on a report from General Secretary Chris Ferguson, adopted a short-term, “final phase” plan to bring the WCRC strongly to the General Council.

...[I]n this final phase of the strategic plan 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 2017 General Council 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). (2016 Executive Committee Minutes)

This “final phase” brought specific focus to the five key directions, identifying a limited number of important outcomes to be achieved in the final year prior to the General Council.

The next five chapters of this report explore the ways in which the priorities from both the 2011 strategic plan and its “final phase” were engaged and implemented. This is followed by a chapter on the challenges that the organization experienced in these last seven years and a chapter that presents an overview of the organization’s finances.

(Note: the Strategic Plan can be found in full on the WCRC website, through the Governance page, in the 2011 Minutes of the Executive Committee, while the “final phase” can be found in the 2017 Minutes.)

Mission

2



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. (2011 Strategic Plan)

The WCRC and its member churches believe that Christian faith is responding to God's call to meet spiritual needs and foster justice for all. God's purpose in Christ is the renewal of all of creation, a dynamic process to which the people of God are called to participate together.

The WCRC understands mission to be the crossing of all borders and barriers that separate people from God, one another and creation, trusting that by crossing borders, the Spirit makes possible reconciliation through Christ.

Creative engagement in God's mission is the joy and responsibility of every believer. The primary place for missional engagement is the local community in which Christians live, even when mission is undertaken within a global Communion that brings the people of Christ together as agents of justice, reconciliation, transformation and redemption.

Mission—bearing witness to the justice of God and overcoming the wrongdoings of the past—requires intentional and continuous efforts of de-linking the historical and enduring connections between slavery, colonialism and Christian mission.

The WCRC seeks to practice mission with and among churches that understand that mission is done in the midst of a religiously plural society.

Mission in the Frontline

The first consultation on “Mission in the Frontline” was held in Breklum, Germany, in November 2013. The consultation was planned first in the context of violence and suffering, with a particular focus on Muslim-Christian tensions.

Participants came from various countries across the world: Egypt, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Germany, Ghana, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Syria and the United Kingdom. Most of the participants came from member churches that live in situations of inter-religious tension and conflict.

Participants shared their stories and also worked together on issues such as religious identity and its visibility; how we can live together in peace as believers from different religions; equal citizenship as a key concept in plural societies; and, finally, how in these situations of tension mission is still possible.

In November 2016 a planning group met in Lebanon along with leaders and pastors from member churches in the Middle East to begin preparations for the next Mission in the Frontline consultation. They touched on numerous topics over several days of meetings including the following:

- The dialogue between Christian and Muslims as a way to strengthen both against fundamentalisms and as a common tool to face the current situation of violence and war;
- The need to break the isolation and to be connected with a worldwide family, such as the WCRC
- The tensions between religious diversity and religious identity;
- The great lessons that can be learned from the history of the Middle East and the ways in which minorities and religions were used in the past by other powers to control the region;
- The importance to address the root causes of the conflicts beyond religious tensions;
- The need to discover the intersectionalities within the current situation in order to articulate the response from the churches;

- The need of the churches in the Middle East to create their own space to articulate a common frame and their prophetic voice; this will help the worldwide family and the international community to understand the ways in which Christians in the region relate with Muslims, to understand their experience, their history and their capability to live and mission in a Muslim world for centuries;
- The affirmation of the grace of God, the presence of Jesus with the communities and with the people lives in their pain and suffering.

The group also set the major priorities for the next consultation, which is planned to be held in November 2017. Primary points to be raised include the following:

- The church as a prophetic voice that deals with values and does not support political parties; wherever the values are, the churches provide support. The church agenda is one: the value of all human beings.
- Mission strategy needs to remember mission is always contextual.
- Church affirming the values of justice, peace and reconciliation; the church must assume its prophetic role which is a difficult one.
- The language of the frontlines is always the starting language.
- Mission has to do with deconstruction, including ecclesiastic powers.
- The challenge to understand the powers behind the media; the use of social media to be critical of the established media.
- If we want to be prophetic we have to engage, lifting the values and discerning the signs of the times. You cannot be a prophetic church if you are isolated.



President Jerry Pillay and General Secretary Chris Ferguson (centre) address members of the 2015 Executive Committee along with leaders of WCRC member churches in Lebanon and Syria.

Global Christian Forum: Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom

In November 2015, President Jerry Pillay represented the WCRC at the Global Christian Forum's consultation on "Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom: Following Christ Together," held in Albania. The purpose of the 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." It drew together nearly 150 Christian leaders from many traditions (including Reformed, Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox and Pentecostal) and deliberated on the religious violence and persecution that was taking place around the world.

Acknowledging that "solidarity among Christian churches is needed to strengthen Christian witness" and repenting of past persecutions of both "each other and other religious communities," the consultation's message included the following in its message:

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.

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.



The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt has hosted a series of interfaith discussions with Coptic Christians and Muslims in an effort to build bridges.

Secularization in Europe

In February 2016 a conference co-hosted in conjunction with the World Council of Churches, the Council for World Mission and the Evangelische Missionswerk was held in Hungary under the theme “Mission in Secularized Contexts.” Sessions at the conference included “Understanding our Landscape(s): Who are we in Europe,” “Secularization and Culture,” “Linking Secularization with the place and role of the churches” (confessional/youth perspectives), “Search for Identity in Secularized Contexts” and case studies from different European countries. In his article “a secular age” Charles Taylor (2007) argues that:

Growing secularism meant at first a greater religious engagement with human relationships and other affairs of “this world.” It responded to a new affirmation of the virtues of ordinary life, including not least the happiness and this-worldly nurturance of family life. It responded to a new sense of historical time, anchored partly in the self-consciousness of early moderns as inhabiting a new era in which older forms of religion might no longer suffice. But growing secularism also meant the understanding that “this world” moved according to an impersonal order of causes and effects within it. And this helped to underwrite the rise of modern science. Though at first this meant reading the word of God in nature rather than ancient texts, it often became disengaged from religious connections to the idea of a larger, transcendent whole.

The general accord of the conference was that “secularizing” is a “natural flow,” and we cannot go against the stream. And therefore swimming against the current is not advisable. It is desirable to prepare and shape the future. However, too much concern and anxiety is not wise. We have to think about what can be done to the stream. The following were points of focus in regards to witnessing in a multireligious world:

- *Build* relationships of respect and trust with people of all religions, restoring justice, healing of memories, reconciliation and peace-building.
- *Encourage* Christians to strengthen their own religious identity and faith ... and to also taking into account the perspectives of the adherents of those religions.
- *Cooperate* with other religious communities engaging in interreligious advocacy towards justice and the common good.

Reformed Partnership Fund

Through the Reformed Partnership Fund, the WCRC accompanies its members in mission by providing small grants and other resources to churches that carry out mission-related projects important to the life of a church and its surrounding community, particularly in the Global South.

In the years since the WCRC gathered in Grand Rapids, grants have been given for a wide variety of mission-oriented projects, as well as for various forms of disaster relief. Grants have gone to projects such as a youth and widows development centre in Nigeria, a project to register and compile abuses women face in Congo, a missional church centre in Myanmar, an indigenous educational centre in Malaysia, a Christian radio in Rwanda, a refugee school for Syrian children in Lebanon, a youth programme in Syria, a community hall in



The Reformed Partnership Fund provides financial assistance to WCRC member churches for both emergency needs and mission-related projects that improve the lives of communities.



Sri Lanka, women's vocational training in Angola, a poultry farm in Zimbabwe, leadership training in Grenada, AIDS testing in Congo, computer training in Burkina Faso, health centres in Malawi, a media project to promote peace and combat poverty in India, a women's shelter in Greece, a community school in Madagascar, bus repair in Cuba, a day centre in Uruguay, a micro-loan project for refugees in Malta, Christian-Muslim dialogue in Egypt, peace building in Nigeria, leadership training in Thailand, a theological network in southern Africa, and emergency relief for El Salvador, Guatemala, Uganda, Pakistan, North Korea, Thailand, Vanuatu and Myanmar.

The majority of funding for the Reformed Partnership Fund comes from WCRC partners *Brot für die Welt*, *Otto per Mille*, and *Evangelischen Missionswerk in Deutschland*. Many of these projects were also supported by other WCRC member churches or ecumenical partners.



3

Communion

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".¹ 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. (2011 Strategic Plan)

In 2010, when the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) united to create the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the new organization chose as its theme "Called to Communion, Committed to Justice." From its beginnings as a unified organization, these things were seen as the cornerstone of the WCRC's mission and witness.

Communion is based on the understanding of *koinonia*, the reality of the participation of all of Christ's sisters and brothers into his body. This reality is visible when bread and wine are shared at Christ's table and when, together, members of the Communion challenge injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom.

The Communion works to unite churches in witness to the Lord Jesus Christ by fostering theological understanding, promoting partnership, strengthening the voice of the church on critical issues, enhancing the witness of member churches and participating with ecumenical peers and partners worldwide. The WCRC fosters church unity and coordinates common initiatives for mission, theological reflection and formation, church renewal, justice and dialogue.

In many regards, all of the work of the WCRC is through or for communion, especially as no activity is taken up singly but always in partnership either

¹ Lima text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry

through member churches or in the broader ecumenical world. The areas of communion addressed in this chapter, however, focus more specifically on ways in which the organization works together to bring itself even more closely together.

Consultation on Communion

Forming a Communion, rather than remaining an alliance or a council, was a purposeful commitment to a process that, if working effectively, would deepen bonds between members and throughout the organization. Mid-way between the 2010 Uniting General Council and this year's Council, a consultation was called to test the progress on this.



The Consultation on Communion, held in February 2014 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, brought together theologians from around the world, including (from left) Sabine Dreßler, Bridget Eli Adzo Ben-Naimah and Iain Torrance.

In February 2014, 50 church leaders from around the world gathered for the Consultation on Communion, producing a report on the state of the Communion that was presented to the WCRC Executive Committee in May 2014.

“Communion is a gift from God” was a recurring theme throughout the consultation and the report, as was the recognition that, for the church, unity is always unity in Christ.

How to maintain this communion, and how the Communion should act both within and outside of itself, were also discussed. While the report included a long list of potential challenges to communion, the report noted, “We, believing in the triune God, discern that our journey as a communion together is never finished, that we continue the process of learning to live together and be open to others, that communion asks something of us and requires to proceed in humility as modeled by our Lord Jesus Christ, patience, bearing with one another in love through the gifts of the Spirit.”

Recommendations from the report included ways to increase participation in the building of the Communion by encouraging more interregional cooperation; fostering dialogues between member churches that are pastoral, relational, marked by mutual respect, reciprocity and accountability; and larger roles for prayer and discernment in decision-making. There was also a call for continuing face-to-face meetings held in different areas of the Communion that would allow for appreciation of diversity of countries, cultures and worship styles, and that those meetings would be safe spaces for member churches to gather.

Cultivating new leadership, through the WCRC’s Global Institute of Theology and other means, was also encouraged, as was ensuring that the practices of the WCRC are non-discriminatory by region and gender. The consultation also suggested ways that communication within the membership of the WCRC could be improved.

Regional Councils

The member churches of the WCRC are grouped into geographic regions, with several of these having recognized regional councils. The WCRC relies on these regional councils for assistance in understanding localized issues, struggles and blessings. The WCRC strives to hold meetings across the regions so that all may better understand each other and grow in the ways to minister and seek justice globally (see chapter 4).

Exposure to different areas of the world provides new insights, and often the agenda for these meetings intentionally includes items pertinent to the region in which they are held. This ongoing process allows the WCRC to support work regionally while also informing members what it means to be truly unified in Christ.

In 2011, a new partnership agreement was signed between the WCRC and the *Evangelische Missionswerk* (EWM), an ecumenical organization in Germany. The new partnership brought two of the regional councils into this partnership: AIPRAL, the Latin American council, was strengthened by the



Regional leaders and WCRC officers gathered for a Regional Empowerment Consultation in February 2017 in Hannover, Germany.



WCRC regional councils hold regular meetings to discuss issues of importance to member churches in their areas. Their elected leaders attend the annual Executive Committee meeting, bringing these concerns to the organization as a whole. Pictured here are attendees of the Northeast Asia Area Council during their meeting in 2014.

partnership, and having additional financial resources allows them to continue to make an impact through meaningful programmes and the production of *La Voz* magazine. The partnership allowed for the resurrection of the African Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC), and they were able to hold consultations and additional meetings that have strengthened the mission of the member churches in Africa. The ACRC has organized several different sub-regional programmes and an assembly.

A 2012 consultation in Geneva gathered regional leaders from the officially recognized councils of Northeast Asia (NEAAC), Africa (ACRC), Europe (WCRC Europe), Latin America (AIPRAL), and the Caribbean and North America (CANAAC) to develop consensus on ways the secretariat and the regional

offices can work together and to identify specific themes or programmes that can be developed jointly. Representatives provided background on their work and the challenges they were facing, which allowed the group to determine which programs they could and should coordinate and which were more prudently left in the hands of the regional offices. Commitment to improved communication among the groups and with the WCRC Secretariat, as well as protocols for achieving better communication, were agreed upon, including commitment to an annual meeting (finances permitting) of the regional leaders and the sharing of regional priorities, as well as financial information.

At its 2016 meeting, the Executive Committee again addressed the issue of regions and regional councils, discussing their relationship to the Communion as a whole and how they should be organized. Two new councils had begun meeting—Indonesia and South Asia—while two other regions sought assistance to begin organizing: the Middle East and the Pacific.

Thus, in February 2017 a Regional Empowerment Consultation was held in Hannover to address not only the broader, strategic issues relating to regions and councils but also to review the recommendations and plans made at the 2012 consultation in Geneva. Attending the consultation were the officers, leaders from the regions, whether they had officially recognized councils or not, and executive staff. This guaranteed representation from all parts of the Communion.

Commitments were made to strengthen coordination between the secretariat and regions on communications, membership fees, projects, programmes and participation. A commitment was also made on a specific mechanism to bring together regional leaders and executive staff annually during Executive Committee meetings. Proposals on the status and formation of regional councils will be brought to the General Council for deliberation.

Member Churches

The WCRC both responds and proactively seeks ways in which to support its member churches in times of need. This important aspect of communion-building can be as simple as issuing a call to prayer for a specific incident, but it can also be as complex as accompanying a member church as it works to bring justice, peace and reconciliation to a war-ravaged area over many years. The areas noted below are just a few examples in which the Communion has come alongside its members.

The Middle East

In an area of the world that sees almost unending unrest and where the Christian faith is under constant threat, member churches continue their faithful work of preaching the gospel. The WCRC stands in solidarity with these brothers and sisters in every way possible.

At the 2015 meeting of the Executive Committee, held in Lebanon, the WCRC adopted a Statement on the Middle East. The statement was crafted during the meeting, as a designated listening team heard the stories from Christians working in Middle Eastern countries. "The cradle of Christianity is in crisis, and many of their streets are shattered, both figuratively and literally," said the document.

Inspired by the words of the prophet Isaiah, the document called on the church to be "the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in" (Isaiah 58:12). The statement reminded that, "Historically, Christians and Muslims have often lived peacefully as neighbours, enjoying a dialogue of life and sharing common values for the good of their community. We lament the deterioration of relationships that has sprung from radical religious movements and express deep regret concerning the way religion is used for political agendas. Even today and despite their increasingly smaller numbers Christians in the Middle East remain the salt and light in their communities. We have seen evidence that their roles and impact in their communities goes far beyond their numbers."

The Executive Committee's meeting in Lebanon "has given us a renewed opportunity to express our solidarity with our members in this region. We do not want to see this as a single act but the beginning of a renewed commitment." The statement called for global recognition of the suffering of all people in the Middle East, an end to violence in Syria and prayers for peace in the region.

The statement also urged that WCRC officers strengthen bonds among Middle Eastern churches, and encouraged member churches beyond the Middle East to join in solidarity with them, telling the stories of people and churches in the Middle East, welcoming neighbours and holding their governments responsible for contributions to unrest in the area. Member churches were also encouraged to draw inspiration from sisters and brothers in the Middle East who show the love of Christ in the face of incredible challenges and frequent calls to suffer and to pray for the end of war and injustice.

Cuba

When the Executive Committee met in Cuba in 2016, the historic occasion was marked with a Statement from Cuba that offered continuing solidarity and support of the Cuban church. The six-day meeting allowed committee members to witness the inspirational work of the church firsthand. "The church taught us that faith is not a fragile enterprise but a resilient force. The church transformed the experience of difficult times into a greater dependency on God with the realization of miracles happening around them every day. Even while governments attempted to separate, erecting walls between nations and peoples, the broader Reformed church still built relationships and partnerships."

These relationships allowed the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba to provide the ecumenical world with strong leaders and offered a theological foundation for understanding mission in the struggles of the Cuban context. The statement also offered respect for the role Cuba played in the Colombia peace talks, and noted that many people in Latin America owe their health to the medical workers Cuba has trained.

The document called on member churches in the United States to continue their work to end the economic blockade/embargo and encouraged all members to build new or strengthen existing relationships with the church in Cuba.

Global Peace Initiatives

Colombia

Peace in Colombia took a significant step forward in 2016 with the signing of the Colombia peace agreement. The agreement brings to a formal end the longest running internal conflict in the world, a half-century of war between FARC guerillas and the Colombian government. As part of the agreement, the FARC renounced its armed struggle and will seek to join in the political process.

“The negotiations have been long and difficult but show that progress towards a just peace can be achieved even in the most challenging circumstances,” said Chris Ferguson. Prior to becoming WCRC general secretary, Ferguson served for three years with the Programme for Ecumenical Accompaniment in Colombia, coming alongside and supporting communities in Colombia that are victims of violence. The Presbyterian Church of Colombia has long been involved in supporting the peace process, as well as the social justice issues that the FARC have highlighted.

Through a grant from the *Otto per Mille* programme, the WCRC is helping to support this continuing work, focusing on accompaniment and verification of the peace process. The Presbyterian Church of Colombia, including its local congregations and ecumenical and civil partners, work in the regions most affected by the conflict to verify that the terms of the peace agreement are being implemented.

Korean Peninsula

In September 2016, a WCRC delegation visiting the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea heard the urgent wish for the de-escalation of provocation and tension, the need to reestablish dialogue and negotiations, and the desire to change the armistice into a peace treaty.

The visit was in the context of the long standing commitment of the WCRC, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the wider ecumenical movement to be in contact with Christians in North Korea and to advocate for the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula. The Korean Christian Federation reiterated its desire to maintain good relations with the churches and ecumenical organizations around the world and appealed to them to continue to work in favour of peace and reunification on the Korean peninsula.



Religious leaders of several faith traditions demonstrated their support for the Colombia peace agreement in 2016 with President Juan Manuel Santos, including WCRC members Jairo Barriga, J. Herbert Nelson, Helis Barraza Diaz, Milton Mejia, Chris Ferguson and Gloria Ulloa.

Both before and after the visit to North Korea, and in conjunction with members and ecumenical partners in the Republic of Korea, the WCRC has issued numerous calls for the de-escalation of the conflict and the promotion of dialogue between all involved.

The Middle East

Beginning with the 2015 Statement on the Middle East, the WCRC has been more proactively focusing on peace-building efforts through its member churches in the Middle East. The Reformed Partnership Fund, bolstered by a special donation from the Reformed Church in America, has supported refugee relief efforts in the Bekaa Valley coordinated by the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (a member church).

Chris Ferguson has been heavily involved in the WCRC's work in the area, including participating in the WCC's Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace Reference Group's visit to Israel/Palestine, various theological reflection projects on the Middle East, two consultations organized by FMEEC focused on Christians in the area, a NESSL round table on the same topic and the General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches.

Internship Programme

Young adults from all over the globe participate in the WCRC's Internship Programme. Their time of service connects them to each other and to the work of the greater church while providing them with experiences that will increase their capacity for leadership in their local churches.

Each year, highly qualified young people apply for 12-month internships in the WCRC offices. The application process is open to English-speaking individuals of WCRC member churches who are aged 30 or younger, including ministers, seminarians in their senior years or Christian professionals, who have an interest in working for their churches or the ecumenical movement at any level. The majority of costs are covered by the *Evangelisches Missionswerk* (EWM), although the intern and/or the sponsoring church are asked to share some of the cost. Member churches and ecumenical partners have also sponsored internships in recent years, providing valuable experience for young leaders.

Interns are purposefully exposed to all of the work of the WCRC, while at the same time embedding themselves in a particular office. Those who have served as interns have been affirmed and stretched in many ways. "I have met a whole lot of great people, and I think it's safe to say that I had a well-rounded experience of working with all the elements of the WCRC," said Aiko Sumichan of Indonesia, who served as an intern in 2013.

Fundiswa Kobo of South Africa, who served as an intern in 2015, first connected to the WCRC through the 2012 Global Institute of Theology, which "challenged me as it brought new insights in what I had always known. Being with theologians from all over the world, sharing our stories, struggles and finding new ways of doing theology was a highlight for me."

"For the church today to communicate and commune with the world, the ecumenical movement is a necessity and not an option," says Chung Doyoung, a 2016 intern from South Korea.



4

Justice

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. (2011 Strategic Plan)

The WCRC, with its member churches, believes that Christian faith calls us to meet spiritual needs and foster justice through the love of Jesus Christ. God has bestowed upon us the deep privilege of becoming co-workers with God in this ministry. In accepting this gift, the WCRC acknowledges the privileges and the responsibilities entrusted to it and recommits itself, therefore, to the basic, yet profound principle that in communion all belong to God and to each other and are accountable together for the stewardship of all God's creation.

In this regard, the WCRC accepts responsibility for our part in the problems of the world. We rejoice that we are led on this journey by the God of justice and we believe that we are called to work with God in creating a different world—a world of peace, of justice and of harmony with creation.

The Office of Justice and Partnership works with the WCRC's regional councils, member churches and ecumenical partners to encourage active engagement in justice issues.

The Accra Confession

The Accra Confession, “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth,” was adopted by the delegates of the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (a predecessor body of the WCRC) in Accra, Ghana, in 2004, and reaffirmed at the 2010 Uniting General Council. The confession is based on the theological conviction that the economic and ecological injustices of today’s global economy require the Reformed family to respond as a matter of faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Accra Confession states that matters of economic and ecological justice are not only social, political and moral issues; they are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church. Being faithful to God’s covenant requires that individual Christians and the churches take a stand against current economic and environmental injustices.

The church stands in solidarity with persons who are suffering and struggling. Following the justice traditions of the biblical prophets and of Jesus in the gospel narratives, the Accra Confession views the current world situation by “looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people.” It calls the churches and society to hear the cries of the people who suffer and the woundedness of creation itself, over-consumed and under-valued by the current global economy.

In 2014, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the confession, the Office of Justice and Partnership worked with the Regional Councils to coordinate a series of consultations in Kenya, Taiwan, Colombia, Jamaica and Germany, culminating in a global consultation held in Hannover, Germany. During these meetings, stories were shared on the ways the message of the Accra Confession continues to resonate and to challenge. The gatherings also affirmed that there is much work to be done to bring about the reform needed to restore the world to what God intends.

The consultation held in Jamaica by the Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC) in March 2014 concluded that, sadly, “in the ten years since the Accra Confession was adopted, nothing much has changed.” The consultation itself proposed three areas of partnership toward justice that can bring action to the tenets we confess in the Accra Confession: human trafficking; poverty, inequality and unemployment and agricultural reform.



Participants came from around the world to the consultation on the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession in November 2014, held in Hannover, Germany.

In June 2014, members of the WCRC's Latin American regional body, known by its Spanish acronym AIPRAL, drafted the Barranquilla Declaration at their consultation. The declaration called for processes to educate and encourage member churches to include the Accra Confession in their books of confessions; for the insertion of the principles of the Accra Confession in public forums such as world banks, governments and other international organizations; for the participation in and support of community efforts that build economic, cultural and political alternatives that place human dignity and care of the environment at the forefront and for stronger alliances with northern churches to develop new economic systems that give God honour and glory for the welfare of all of God's people.

The Barranquilla Declaration noted that "the Accra Confession unmasks the ideal of the 'human being' from a capitalist system that excludes many, and is also characterized by exploitation and selfishness. The Confession exalts humanity as an object or means to rescue the biblical idea of the human being created in the image of God."

In September 2014, over two-dozen delegates of the Africa Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC) gathered in Nairobi, Kenya. After critiquing and discerning the witness of the Accra Confession, the delegates grappled with the need to move out of the “mission-station” mind-set and identified some of the theological principles and activities to advance the church in its work. These included creating opportunities for African church leaders, theologians, pastors and Christians to discuss cultural and spiritual experiences that are uniquely African and urging the ACRC Executive Committee to investigate opportunities and facilitate processes for theological reflection, including the organization of conferences, scholarships and stimulating engagement on the Accra Confession; pledging solidarity with African young women and men who are victims of human trafficking and child abuse and denouncing power obsession in all structures of member churches.

The Northeast Asia Area Council (NEAAC), meeting in Taipei, Taiwan, in September 2014, brought together representatives from churches in Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Hong Kong. Those present noted that, while issues vary from one region to another, many concerns crossed borders, including wage exploitation, racial discrimination and suppression of human rights. The Council also noted, “Given that in this region Christians are a minority living in a multi-religious society, it is essential that we as Christians cooperate with other religions in addressing the issues raised by the Accra Confession. All people, regardless of beliefs, are impacted by the current economic and financial architecture. All bear a common responsibility as citizens to transform the injustices inherent in the system to ensure a social safety net to protect the weak, the disadvantaged, the young and the women in particular.” The Council expressed the desire for an action plan for detangling and dealing with the world’s many areas of injustice.

WCRC Europe’s consultation, in October 2014, focused specifically on asylum and migration as a critical justice issue for the region and looked at both the causes of forced migration and the reactions of European countries to the influx of refugees. Participants heard from a variety of speakers, including those from the European countries that initially receive refugees—Greece and Italy—as well as those who work to settle them more permanently, such as Hungary and Germany. Another important voice at the consultation was from the Middle East: “It’s easy to send money; the most difficult is to be with people in their pain.” But that is what the church is called to do: to be with people. How is this to be done if the border is closed?

In November 2014, the global consultation heard from all regions and issued a report that recommended a series of commitments be adopted by the WCRC's Executive Committee:

- openness to the challenges of the Accra Confession as new crises arise and call for new understandings;
- liberation and resistance against all forms of domination;
- working with partners and social movements;
- deep listening to voices on the margins and those we have silenced, as well as to the voice of the Spirit.

Action areas were also recommended: critical reading of Scripture and creative resources for congregations to witness to the God of Life, caste, climate change, gender and sexuality, human trafficking, immigration and migration, the New International Financial and Economic Architecture, racism and the theology of enough.

As a follow up to these Accra consultations, a pair of bi-regional consultations were held over the following two years under the banner of "Accra +10." While the participation broadened, the focus narrowed, and each consultation looked at the Accra Confession with a gender justice approach. This was done to emphasize the link between gender and economic justice.

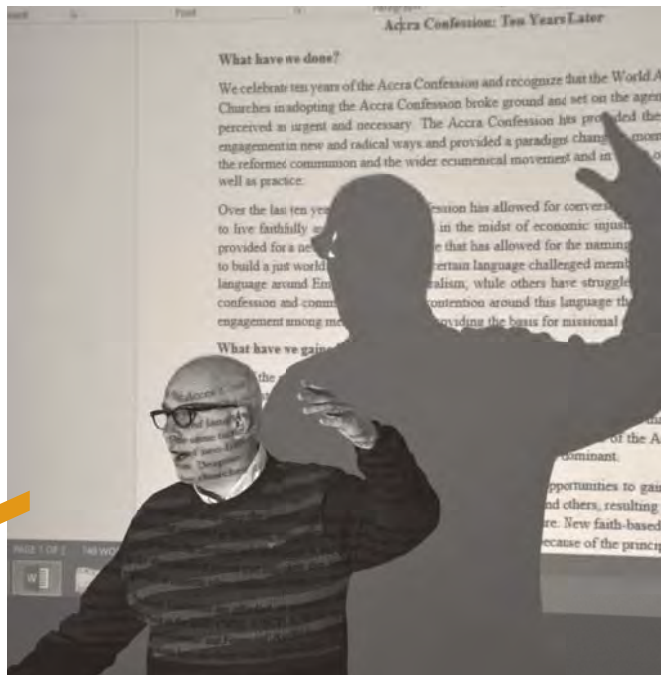
In November 2015, participants from the ACRC and NEAAC came together under the theme "Gender Reading of the Signs of Times" to reflect through the lenses of gender perspective and different contexts on the challenges churches face regarding violence, injustice and the degradation of both human beings and nature.

After a process of discernment and studying the Word of God, the delegates committed to work at the following issues and call the attention of all the member churches to do the same:

- facilitate training and re-training of ministers in order to have life-affirming biblical interpretation;
- work at amending policies and constitutional provisions that impede the full participation of all;
- develop a Bible study model for use in local churches to encourage inclusion; enhance the network between the member churches, regions and the international Communion and support their work as well as ensure fair representation for all;
- create or strengthen justice desks in all member churches.

The second bi-regional consultation took place in Cuba in January 2016. Participants from the Americas—both AIPRAL and CANAAC—also came together under the theme “Gender Reading of the Signs of Times.”

The consultation produced a statement that concluded: “We are called to a mission of justice that requires from us public and political action. We are called to denounce the unjust systems and to work toward justice and equity, to articulate new models of relationship, and to sojourn with the people for and towards peace. In that walking with the people, we are expected to denounce the way mass media continues to create images that encourage discrimination and the commodification of people. This requires a church leadership that is committed to our Reformed faith and mission and to these projects through local, national and regional acting.”



Roberto Jordan makes a presentation at the global consultation on the 10th anniversary of the Accra Confession.

Economic Justice

São Paulo Declaration Launches Conversation

Taking on a mandate from the 2010 Uniting General Council to address the issue of economic injustice through the issue of the global financial architecture/system, in 2012, the WCRC, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM) drafted the “São Paulo Statement: International Financial Transformation for the Economy of Life.” The document called for economic reforms worldwide that will result in “an ethical, just and democratic international financial regime grounded on a framework of common values: honesty, social justice, human dignity, mutual accountability and ecological sustainability.”



Working for economic justice takes many forms. A conference attended by both banking and faith leaders in Argentina in December 2016 addressed the ethics and economics of the international financial architecture.

Pictured (from left to right): Dora Arce-Valentin, Helis Barraza Díaz, Dario Barolin, Adelaida Jimenez Cortés, Milton Mejia and Carola Tron.

Ecumenical bodies from Latin America leveraged the document to engage in meetings with government representatives in Argentina, Bolivia, Peru and Guyana.

The declaration also spawned the Ecumenical Panel on a New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) in 2013. Created by the WCRC, the WCC, the CWM and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the group of economic experts was tasked with creating proposals to promote ethical, just and sustainable systems of economics and finance.

The panel established these priorities:

1. Establish an ecumenical school of governance, economics and management to build economic competencies within the ecumenical movement;
2. Convene an interfaith conference on alternative banking;
3. Conduct monitoring of government expenditures and revenues and demand reforms when the government does not operate in the public interest, when it empowers or tolerates corruption, special privileges and “rent-seeking” benefits, when it impedes citizen oversight, and when it favours the rich over the poor, one ethnic or social group over another, men over women;
4. Join in and strengthen existing international civil society efforts to encourage the adoption of a comprehensive debt workout mechanism;
5. Contribute to the preparation of a conference to take stock of reforms of the international financial architecture, and to identify and demand necessary reforms towards the establishment or transformation of practices and institutions that can foster a just and democratic system of global financial and economic governance; and
6. Conduct campaigns to enable governments and international financial and economic institutions to replace economic growth as an indicator of progress with indicators that assess the whole human social, economic and ecological condition and support research to assess already existing alternatives.

The work toward accomplishing these priorities include the launch of the Governance, Economics and Management (GEM) School. During these 10-day learning opportunities, church leaders, emerging leaders and economic experts gather to discuss more just economic systems. At the conclusion, students prepare project proposals that may be carried out during the next two to three years, with the goal of challenging and reshaping the economy. The first GEM school was held in Hong Kong in 2016 while the second will be held in Lusaka, Zambia, in August and September 2017.

Social Justice

Human trafficking enslaves an estimated 21 million people worldwide. Of these, 14.2 million (68 percent) are exploited for labor, 4.5 million (22 percent) are sexually exploited, and 2.2 million (10 percent) are exploited in state-imposed forced labor.¹ Many of these trafficked people are children.

Human trafficking is an intentional trade that impacts all of us. Trafficking uses the bodies of women, men and children as commodities to satisfy demands for labour and sex as part of a wide-ranging economic system that commodifies people and assigns unequal values to people based on their gender, race, status and sexuality. The root causes lie in economic systems that generate and perpetuate poverty and recognize no intrinsic value to human beings.

The WCRC Justice Network met in Cuba in 2013 to discuss a programme that would address this issue. The participants saw in human trafficking an injustice that exposed the greater systematic economic injustice the Reformed family had confessed in Accra as sin. Human trafficking manifests the distorted and violating principles of our economies in which people are sacrificed for profit, and the intrinsic dignity of human beings is denied and derided. In January 2014 a working group met in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to develop a project and a concept paper to address this painful issue.

This work led to the development of "Broken for You," a resource to be used during the season of Lent 2015. The devotional included liturgies for worship services as well as daily readings and practical ways to combat human trafficking. The "Broken for You" campaign was conceived to raise awareness of the

¹ Statistics from <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/human-trafficking-numbers>.



Members of the Human Trafficking Working Group met on the Mexico-United States border.

evils of human trafficking and seek to engender a spirituality that honours the lives and dignity of all people. Although only available in English, feedback was positive and it was used in many WCRC member churches.

The Working Group on Human Trafficking also met in July 2015 in El Paso, Texas, USA. There, the group heard personal stories of migrants and those working to minister to them on the Mexico-United States border, which gave members a vivid understanding of the issues faced on all sides.

The working group met with organizations engaged in trafficking, immigration and border ministry. The groups included *Pasos de Fe*, *Casa Amiga*, *AnnunciationHouse*, *Project Vida*, *Derechos Humanos Integrales en Accion* and the Center for Hope. The working group also traveled to Juarez, Mexico, and met with organizations that work on ending gender violence, femicide and trafficking. The group plans to continue working on issues around human

trafficking with a holistic approach, taking into consideration the multidimensional causes that contribute to make people vulnerable of losing their integrity as human beings and become “commodities:” neoliberal globalization, climate change and wars, among many others.

Refugees

WCRC Europe’s Conference on Asylum and Migration, held in October 2014 in Hannover, Germany, discussed the crucial issue of the number of refugees that continue to enter Europe and how the church should respond.

The conference focused on both the literal and metaphorical high fences that have been created by governmental policies and cultural indifference. The church is called to be committed to these people because they are God’s people. Although many churches throughout Europe are working with refugees, much work remains in breaking down governmental barriers and helping people secure housing, jobs and the life skills necessary to live in a new country.

In late 2016, WCRC Europe created a Task Force on Migration and Refugees, a response to the unprecedented number of refugees entering Europe. The task force began with theological reflections on migration, engaging in a dialogue about Christian-Muslim relations, partnering with Middle East churches, sharing best practices from various contexts and doing all of this through concrete actions of solidarity.

The task force met in both Hungary and Greece to witness first-hand the responses of member churches. They also heard from other European members, including those on the task force itself, about the efforts by member churches to welcome and resettle refugees in their new countries. Some churches have also invested effort in changing the laws and restrictions that make refugee resettlement difficult.

The task force issued a draft statement to WCRC Europe members which reads, in part: “The people seeking refuge are not merely an ethical or political challenge confronting the Church. They challenge our Churches in their innermost theological identity and mission. In faithful accordance with the biblical witness, its calling and mission the Reformed Church has a long-standing tradition of being committed to the life, dignity and wellbeing of refugees.”

Gender Justice

Delegation to the United Nations

In March 2014, Dora Arce Valentín, the WCRC Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, joined a delegation from the Presbyterian Church (USA) that advocated for gender equity with the 58th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. This Commission is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and is the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. The WCRC's presence in the delegation gave visibility as a Reformed family committed to gender justice and against gender violence.

Groups concerned for gender justice from around the world participated in the Commission. The priority theme for the 58th Commission was "challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls." Responding to the priority theme, Ecumenical Women advocated for four themes to be included in the outcome document of the Commission: poverty and hunger; access to quality education, employment and decision-making; full access to health, including sexual and reproductive health services; and transformational shifts in social norms in response to violence against women and girls.

Ending Violence against Women

In November 2013, churches worldwide were invited to join *Speak Out Sunday* to promote dialogue, teaching, prayer and action about sexual- and gender-based violence and its prevention. The day was organized by *We Will Speak Out*, a global coalition of Christian-based NGOs and church organizations, including the WCRC. *Speak Out Sunday* marked the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, observed from 25 November (United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December, the International day for Human Rights.

A report released in June 2013 by the World Health Organization highlighted physical or sexual violence as a public health problem that affects more than one third of all women globally. The report, the first systematic study of global data on the prevalence of violence against women, found that intimate partner violence is the most common type of violence against women, affecting 30 percent of women worldwide. *We Will Speak Out* aims to harness efforts to end sexual violence by supporting churches to speak out against

sexual violence, show strong and positive leadership and become safe places for people to go to. It also works to influence legislation and policies with a united voice.

Public promotion includes participation in the “*Thursdays in Black*” campaign against sexual and gender-based violence and the annual “16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence” along with ecumenical and interreligious partners such as the Lutheran World Federation, Mission 21, World Council of Churches, Anglican Communion, Young Women’s Christian Association, *Islamic Relief*. The campaign runs every year from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day.

Scholarships for women

The WCRC supports women through its Theological Education Scholarship Fund for Women in the South. Established in 2001, the scholarship fund enables women from a wide network of Reformed churches in the Global South to build their capacity for effective partnership in God’s mission.

The fund provides for first degree or diploma studies that are done at a seminary or college in the home country or region of scholarship awardees. More than three dozen women from countries including Argentina, Brazil, Cameroon, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guyana, India, Kenya, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda and Venezuela have thus far received awards from the fund and are being prepared for the ordained ministry.

Ordination of women

The 2015 Executive Committee approved the creation of a task group to work on the issue of women’s ordination. The first meeting for this task group gathered with the purpose of:

1. Strategizing about further steps that need to be taken in order to fulfill the mandate of the UGC, taking into consideration the implications that women’s ordination has on the nature of communion and in the struggles for gender justice.
2. Studying the issue of ordination (of women and men) so as to critically assess the role of ordained ministry that can play in sharpening the prophetic witness, mission and contribution of the churches in a world of grave injustice and discrimination.

3. Producing resource materials to facilitate dialogue within and among member churches to stay in dialogue on the various implications for their own lives and in their accountability to each other and with the executive committee of the WCRC.
4. Presenting proposals to our next executive committee about specific recommendations they should consider to complete the mandate they gave us as a task group.

The Task Group on Women's Ordination met twice face-to-face. The first meeting took place in October 2015, in Hannover, Germany. The second meeting took place in January 2016, in Havana, Cuba. Over these two meetings the Task Group wrote "Toward Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination" which was then presented to the 2016 Executive Committee, which then agreed to move a "Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination" to the 2017 General Council for consideration (see the General Council Workbook for the declaration).



Yvette Rabemila and Brigitte Rabarijaona, both ordained ministers in the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar, were the recipients of the 2014 Sylvia Michel Prize.

Oikotree Movement

As one of the sponsoring ecumenical bodies of Oikotree Movement, together with CWM and WCC, the WCRC has been working to strengthen the vision that brings this movement to life as one of the many impacts of the Accra Confession (WARC GA, 2004)¹.

Two global forums have been held in recent years: in 2010 in Arnoldsheim, Germany, and in 2013 in Johannesburg, South Africa. Oikotree also made a prophetic contribution to the process of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (Kingston, Jamaica, 2011) and was actively involved in developing the new WCC “Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism” which the WCC-CWME (Commission on World Mission and Evangelism) adopted at its 2012 Central Committee. One of the significant commitments made was to be engaged in theological studies and training programmes, which has become one of the most important areas the Oikotree Movement is currently emphasizing.

In Johannesburg, one of the most important steps was to organize five working groups for facilitating different aspects of the work. The five working groups are: Transformative Theology, Transformative Education, Joint Struggle, Resource Mobilization and Networking and Communication. In 2016, two more working groups were added; Research and Analysis and Life-Enhancing Agriculture. It is through these groups that much of the Oikotree Movement’s ongoing work is accomplished.

Working Group Activities

Joint Struggle. This group has been actively engaged in solidarity action work with the Integrated Rural Development of Weaker Sections movement in India, and in Korea with the Oikos Theology Movement, the Korean Students Christian Federation and the National Council of Churches on the issue of POSCO (formerly Pohang Iron and Steel Company is a multinational steel-making company headquartered in Pohang, South Korea). Through persistent resistance in Orissa, India, POSCO finally decided to withdraw their engage-

¹ In May, 2006, a forum organized by CWM and WARC (one of the bodies that become part of WCRC in 2010) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was Living out the Accra Confession: Implications for our Spirituality and Mission. The Forum issued an historic statement entitled “Living Out the Accra Confession,” which became a signpost for the Oikotree Movement.

ment from Orissa. The group is currently developing ways in which the Oikotree Movement can accompany the ongoing peace process in Colombia.

Transformative Theology. This group, through a theological reflection process on the issue of land, was able to complete and publish *Listen to the Land! Responding to Cries for Life* (available on the WCRC website).

Transformative Education. This group organized a workshop on transformative education in February 2015, at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Matanzas, Cuba. In the search for effective responses to the ecological turmoil that puts the future of God's creation at stake, it was concluded that the current dichotomical epistemology must be replaced. Without a new, more organic, relational and holistic vision, the ecological disaster we face may be unstoppable. The Oikotree Movement published the collection of the papers presented at the workshop as *Life-Enhancing Learning Together* (available on the WCRC website).

Research and Analysis. This working group functions as a resource group that identifies issues that require reflection and analysis; highlights current research findings on climate justice, ecology, economy and theology; proposes emerging issues that require new research and analysis and identifies the current information on alternatives.

Life-Enhancing Agriculture. Through this group, the movement will commit to life-enhancing agriculture as an alternative way of life through which we can enhance the whole *oikos*, and as a driving force for reconstructing alternative systems for an ecologically conscientious and just human society.

Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations

The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations represents the Presbyterian Church (USA) at the United Nations and also serves as the conduit for the WCRC to bring issues to the United Nations. Staff members help inspire, equip and connect members for ministry as faithful disciples of Jesus in the global community.

The Ministry works to achieve its broad goals—advocating for justice and peace—while also addressing current issues that come before the United Nations. For instance, the Ministry coordinates participation in the UN Commission on the Status of Women’s annual conference, which brings together political, religious and humanitarian leaders from around the world, to address systemic issues. At the same time, the Ministry takes up specific causes, such as hosting delegations from the Presbyterian Church in Colombia and church leaders in Sudan, as they bring their pleas for peace to the body.

Throughout all of their work, the Ministry helps witness for justice and peace, in the name of Jesus Christ, within the UN community. Through the Ministry, the church responds to Christ’s call to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and to let the oppressed go free.

Theology

5



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. (2011 Strategic Plan)

In Reformed theology, we affirm and embody characteristics that distinguish how we see our place in God's world. A deep allegiance to the authority of the Bible as God's Word was central to the development of the 16th century Protestant Reformation; continuing recognition of that authority is basic to our identity in Christ as guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17). As churches also informed by creedal and confessional documents that summarize our understanding of Scripture, we submit our own traditions and ambitions to constant reformation by the Spirit as we live as followers of Jesus Christ in ever changing cultures (*Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*—the Reformed church always has to be reforming).

Covenantal theology provides a framework by which we see holistic connections in God's unfolding plan of salvation, to which we are called to witness. To own our Reformed identity is to express appreciation for God's gift of grace. At the same time, it evokes a commitment to strive tirelessly by God's grace to become more and more the Communion that God calls us to be. Embracing God's sovereign love, manifested in the call of Christ, we are compelled to express spiritual and social solidarity with those who suffer injustice and brokenness in this world (Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8). The gracious sovereignty of God reminds us that God lovingly claims this whole world as God's own. That recognition energizes our carrying out of our calling in God's mission (Matthew 28:18-20). It encourages us to develop our intellect and skills in all areas of life to be a light in a dark world (Matthew 5:16).



*Global Institute of Theology students
met in San Jose, Costa Rica, in 2014.*

Global Institute of Theology

The WCRC offers the Global Institute of Theology (GIT), an intensive, short-term academic programme designed to give 50 theological students from all over the world an opportunity to learn and do theology in an inter-contextual and ecumenical way, situating the theological task in local, regional and world contexts, with teachers also gathered from around the world.

The specific goals of the GIT are to build a community of learning and faith as students and faculty work together; to encounter contemporary biblical and theological approaches; to introduce the varying contextual perspectives on the Christian witness of the global Reformed family; to strengthen global networks of sharing and reflection to contribute to the ecumenical formation of a new generation of church leaders within the Reformed community.

In 2010, the GIT was held in conjunction with the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, in collaboration with, and under the academic auspices of, McCormick Theological Seminary (Chicago, Illinois) and Calvin Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids). Sixty students participated in this GIT. The theme of the Uniting General Council, "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace" (Ephesian 4:3), was its theme. As the WARC and REC entered into a new unity characterized as a Communion, the courses of the Institute examined the relationship between communion and mission. The covenanting process already begun was continued with the students reflecting on the churches' response to economic injustice and ecological devastation. They were challenged to explore contemporary biblical and theological approaches in their inter-confessional, intercultural and interreligious dimensions, and to discern their relevance to the Council theme. This included the study of lived and living missiologies and Reformed identity and mission.

Through lectures, seminars, exposures, contextual experiences, the sharing of stories and participation in the life of the churches in the United States, the GIT explored the theme of the Uniting General Council and related subjects. The students also participated fully in the life of the Uniting General Council, through Bible studies, worship, attendance at plenary and study sessions and other events.

In 2012, 53 theologians met at Duta Wacana Christian University in Indonesia for three weeks of intense study. Participants were offered a programme that included both classroom learning and encounter experiences with members of the diverse community with which the university has connections, including a choice of two-day exposure visits to a Muslim *pesantren* (residential school), a Buddhist *mendut* (centre) near the Prambanan temple or a rural Christian church community. The list of options also included spending time with people working on post-disaster recovery in an area hit by an earthquake and volcanic eruption. The direct encounters were designed to challenge, transform and enrich students' theology and worldview.

Gathering under the theme “Transforming Mission, Community and Church” the WCRC’s fourth GIT took place during July 2014 on the campus of the *Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana* (Biblical University of Latin America) in San José, Costa Rica. Students focused on the topics of mission, community and church, but they were also given a variety of elective courses from which to choose, including contextual Bible reading, Christian mission in Latin America and Reformed identity and the search for vital churches. Immersion experiences included attending local churches for worship each Sunday, traveling to sites in Costa Rica and visiting churches’ outreach projects. But it is the contact with other students that has the most long-term impact. “Students come with their stories—stories of hope, joy, grief and concern—and they share that. And when they go home, they are part of a global community,” said Douwe Visser, WCRC executive secretary for theology and GIT secretary.

The GIT wasn’t held in 2016 so that the Institute can be held in conjunction with this year’s General Council. This allows students to experience the GIT and provides them with the opportunity to participate in a global ecumenical gathering. From a record number of applications, 50 students have again been selected for this year’s GIT and will meet for three weeks at the *Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal/Bethel* before relocating to Leipzig during the General Council. Along with the General Council theme, “Living God, renew and transform us,” the GIT will reflect on confessions and confessing churches, especially given its close proximity to the town of Barmen. There in 1934, in spite of the looming threat of the Nazi take-over of the German Church, Christians from all over Germany came together and made a courageous confession that only Christ is the Lord of the Church. This Barmen Confession became a symbol of the assertion that transformation comes only through the Word of the Living God. Four main courses will focus on different dimensions of Reformed theology and the missional responsibilities of the church in the world today. Eight elective courses (of which students will select two) will delve into life experiences of Christians as they deal with challenges to the unity and communion the WCRC seeks.

Dialogues

Theological conversations among and between other bodies of believers inform our mission and enrich our working relationships. By reaching across denominational and theological boundaries, we deepen our faith and our understanding of each other, and pave the way toward collaborative work and a united voice on global issues. Ongoing dialogues have been sometimes challenging, sometimes remarkable, but always fruitful, as participants come together in their understanding of what it means to be followers of the one, holy God. Each series of dialogues begins with a focus on existing touch points between the faith traditions.

Roman Catholic Church

The fourth phase of the international dialogue between the WCRC and the Roman Catholic Church focused on the themes of justification and sanctification, Word and sacrament and justice. The culmination of five years of intense conversations about these theological issues that have historically divided the two Christian communions resulted in the document *Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent of Justice*. The report highlighted areas of substantial agreement on many important theological standards: agreement that justification and sanctification cannot be separated; therefore “justification will make possible and lead to the fruits of virtuous action;” agreement that justification and sanctification are brought about by the Holy Spirit by means of Word and Sacrament; and agreement that the theological doctrine and reality of justification “impels the Christian community to act on behalf of justice.” This document is currently in process to be formally received by the Executive Committee.

Lutheran World Federation

The second (and most recent) round of formal dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) spoke to common theology and the possibility of more cooperative ministry at the local level, where it already happens frequently. While the dialogue concluded in 2010, it took some years to finish the final report, *Communion: On Being Church*. This document was received by both Executive Committees in 2014 (and is available on the WCRC website). The report celebrated the many places where there is unity in Christ and that things that once divided us have been set aside for the sake of the gospel. Shared history, shared creeds and confessions, and shared mission going forward, particularly at the local level, continue to pave the way for closer unity.

Anglican Communion

In November 2015, the first dialogue in more than 30 years was held between the Anglican and Reformed Communion. Focused on the topic of communion, the dialogue is intended to result in a “better understanding of each other during a time of rapid change, a better understanding of ourselves and how we may resolve disagreement better and an improved ability to concentrate on what matters most—namely, articulating the gospel of Jesus Christ today,” said Iain Torrance, president emeritus of Princeton Theological Seminary, former moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and a participant in the dialogue.

The theme of the first meeting was “The Nature of Communion” and drew on the New Testament word *koinonia*, as it currently describes the nature of the interrelationships between churches. The perspectives on communion from the recent World Council of Churches document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* played a role in the conversation, as did presentations from a number of the participants. Three subtopics emerged from the first meeting and became the focus of further dialogue: the marks of communion; communion, unity and divergence; and communion, governance and authority.



Formal dialogues gather theological leaders from both “sides” in different locations around the world. The consultations always include a component that focuses on the local context of the hosting church. Pictured here are participants in the Anglican-Reformed Dialogue in Cambridge, England.

The second meeting, held in Cambridge, United Kingdom, in September 2016, included discussion of the nature of communion, its quality and intensiveness, misunderstandings over theological and adiaphoral issues (neither authoritatively required nor forbidden matters), the continuities of the two ecclesial traditions and the ways in which such continuities are ritualized in contrast to society outside the church. The commission will meet again in 2017.

Pentecostals

Three sessions of dialogue have been held with representatives of the Pentecostal church around the theme of “Ministering to the Needs of the World: Mission and Pneumatology.” Each session allowed for the presentation of papers from each tradition, followed by discussions during which similarities and differences were analyzed and refined. These fruitful and challenging discussions helped the teams appreciate the respective views on the Holy Spirit’s work in mission.

“Folks from Reformed and Pentecostal churches relate to each other in a variety of contexts around the world. Those interactions are often marked by false assumptions or stereotypes that folks on one side make about the other. The dialogue is important because it allows us to overcome the stereotypes and dig into the depths of each tradition,” said Karla Ann Koll, co-chair of the dialogue from the Reformed delegation.

Please also see chapter 6 for additional information on relations with Christian world communions.

Reformed World

The WCRC's theological journal, *Reformed World*, promotes Reformed theology through scholarly articles written by theologians worldwide. Published three times a year, the journal is sent to all member churches, many member seminaries and Christian colleges, member church leaders and theologians and paying subscribers. Now in its 67th year, *Reformed World* is also available digitally on the WCRC website. Efforts continue to bring additional issues online, to create a significant, freely accessed archive.

While the writings in the journal are traditionally deep and scholarly, the publication has also lent its pages to honour General Secretary Setri Nyomi in appreciation of his 14 years of service to the organization. There also is a concerted effort to give voice to young theologians. And while published primarily in English, because many of the contributors have a first language other than English, *Reformed World's* pages sometimes reflect this diversity.

Global Reformed Network of Theologians

The WCRC has had a global network of Reformed theologians that has met periodically and been involved in the development of a global Reformed Theology to provide the theological basis for the Communion of Churches to listen to God's call and be part of God's mission in the world; to live out the communion; and be committed to justice. Members of this network of theologians are drawn from all regions of the Communion, women and men who are involved in theological reflection in a challenging and contextual way, some with expertise in missiology. They meet for a global reflection on the ongoing developments in Reformed theology and are regarded as the theological "think tank" of the WCRC. The results of the work of this group can be seen in articles and study documents of the WCRC, especially in *Reformed World*. The group works on clear guidelines for the member churches on how the churches can mirror in each context the call to mission, communion and justice.

Lombard Prize

The WCRC, in association with Lombard, Odier & Cie, Bankers of Geneva, Switzerland, offers a prize for a theological essay in memory of the late Georges Lombard, who served as general treasurer for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC, one of WCRC's predecessor organizations) from 1948 to 1970. The bank and Lombard's family established the award to encourage and support exceptional students and young pastors from WARC member churches.

The aim of the prize, which is offered once every two to three years, is to encourage theological work in the classical traditions of Reformed thought that deals with a contemporary problem. Students of theology are invited to submit essays that bring together the elements of faith and theology in dialogue with practical issues in the real world that are the central elements of Reformed witness.

In 2013 Victor Audu, a member of the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria, and Maria Elisabeth Voorwinden, a member of the *Protestantste Kerk in Nederland*, were awarded cash prizes for their essays, as well as scholarships to the 2014 Global Institute of Theology.

The contest is again being held this year, a purposeful delay to coincide with the General Council. It is hoped that the first place essayist will be present at the General Council, while the first three placed essays will be published later this year in *Reformed World*.

Ecumenical Engagement

6



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. (2011 Strategic Plan)

There is much to celebrate in our common heritage as diverse churches serving the same God. Since 2010, the WCRC has participated in rich conversations with a number of Christian communions worldwide. A half century ago the goal of the Reformers was not division of the church but rather reformation within the church. Since then there is no question that division has plagued the church, and not all of those divisions have been theological in nature. Surely God is aggrieved by this. But there is also reason to hope that some day divisions will end. Rich and fruitful conversations and collaborative efforts continue to happen. We must continue, with intention, to work to build bridges between communions, so that God's kingdom will come on Earth.

Roman Catholic Church

In recent years, the WCRC has had many opportunities to strengthen relationships with the Roman Catholic Church, with a high point being a meeting with Vatican officials, including Pope Francis, in June 2016. The meeting allowed for both a celebration of increased understanding and collaboration, as well as a renewed urgency to work more closely together, notwithstanding the challenges many member churches face in their own contexts with the Catholic Church.

In his official address to Pope Francis, General Secretary Chris Ferguson stated that it was with a sense of both "joy and urgency" that these meetings were taking place: "Our joy comes from knowing that through repentance



The full delegation to the Vatican (from left to right): Aruna Gnanadason, Dora Arce-Valentin, Gabriela Mulder, President Jerry Pillay, General Secretary Chris Ferguson, Pope Francis, Cardinal Kurt Koch, Eugenio Bernardini, Bishop Brian Farrell, Phil Tanis and Father Avelino González-Ferrer.

and dialogue we are growing closer to the unity that is Christ's gift to the church, so that all may believe," noting the progress made through official dialogues and the process of associating with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ; see below).

Ferguson also spoke of urgency: "We cannot hesitate but must move decisively forward together in the face of the perils and suffering confronting this world and all her people." He drew parallels between the commitments of both the WCRC and the Roman Catholic Church to social justice, citing the Accra Confession and *Laudato Si*, an encyclical letter of Pope Francis on the care of "our common home."

In his address, Pope Francis said, "...[T]here are many areas in which Reformed and Catholics can work together in bearing witness to God's merciful love, which is the true remedy for the confusion and indifference that seem to surround us...There is urgent need for an ecumenism that, along with theological dialogue aimed at settling traditional doctrinal disagreements between Christians, can promote a shared mission of evangelization and service."

During their trip to the Vatican, the WCRC delegation also met with members of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU). The WCRC and the PCPCU had held a series of International Reformed-Catholic dialogues, beginning in 2011, that had brought together theologians from across the spectrum to discuss justification, the Eucharist, and justice, among other topics. The resulting report—*Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice*—is currently in process to be received by the Executive Committee.



General Secretary Chris Ferguson (left) and President Jerry Pillay (right) take a moment with Catholic Cardinal Kurt Koch prior to their audience with Pope Francis in June 2016.

Additionally, the WCRC delegation met with the Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice (PCPJ). The meeting with the PCPJ focused on areas of possible convergence on issues of common interest. The wide-ranging discussion included topics such as the economy of life, virtuous entrepreneurship, other ways in which theologically-based development could ensure the just inclusion of all and the stewardship of God's creation.

Lutheran World Federation

The Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission was established in 2006. Between 2006 and 2012, representatives from around the world gathered with the agencies' theology secretaries and two theological consultants, one Lutheran and one Reformed. The mandate of the Commission included "monitoring and advising upon Lutheran-Reformed relations around the world" and exploring "the possibility of common actions and statements and seek to promote joint studies relevant to Lutheran-Reformed relations."

Communion: On Being the Church, published in 2014, is the document that outlines those common concerns and offers suggestions on ways the two can work together in the future. The document begins by looking backward, to the roots of division in the days of the Reformation. The document acknowledges that some of what once divided us is less important centuries later, and that much progress has been made among the churches of the Reformation with regard to mutual recognition and common life:

Yet, in spite of our shared history and understanding of the church and the common agreements that have been in place for decades, churches have not claimed the fullness of the shared life that is available to them. Our realizations of visible unity have been partial and fragmentary...It is becoming increasingly clear that a shared history and understanding of the church and agreement in doctrine—although important—do not suffice to make our communion a lived reality. It is not satisfactory simply to appeal to the unity we have spiritually or the unity we will have eschatologically. God-given unity calls us to work toward making it a lived reality, challenges us to be transformed and calls us to new ways of being the church.

The conversations also targeted global barriers to unity and to the work of the church. Rather than issues of theology, division is more often over the issues of race, ethnicity, economic class, language and culture that shape our identities, whether Lutheran or Reformed. And barriers vary depending on the cultural context. For example, in Latin America, where Protestants are a minority in areas dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, traditional ecumenical relationships are difficult, while in North America, a culture of materialism undermines the church's quest for justice.

Formally and informally, churches within the two groups have been acknowledging each other and working together for many years, including the formation of union congregations and shared mission opportunities. The report affirms and encourages more cooperation at the grass roots, calling upon churches of the LWF and WCRC to follow the Lund Principle, that is, jointly to carry out whatever can be done together and only work separately where there is a compelling reason to do so.

The WCRC and LWF will also follow this principle in terms of administrative cooperation, and will work together on the production of joint liturgies and other resources and will encourage their seminaries to share resources as well. The two organizations will also continue to send representative to each other's meetings and continue programmatic collaboration on actions that would benefit from a coordinated approach (i.e., HIV/AIDS, economic injustice, illegitimate debt, hunger, human rights, ecojustice issues, water rights, etc.).

A public declaration to this effect—titled the “Wittenberg Witness”—will be made at this year's General Council in the town of Wittenberg. This common witness will confess the tragedy of a divided church, claim the fruit of the two organizations' decades of committed dialogue and celebrate the new steps towards unity taken by their member churches around the world.

Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

In 1999, after many years of committed dialogue, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) was signed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation. In it, Catholics and Lutherans state that the churches now share “a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.” They acknowledge that the condemnations relating to the doctrine of justification set forth by the Council of Trent and the Lutheran confessions do not apply to the Catholic and Lutheran teachings on justification set forth in the declaration.

The JDDJ establishes this “common understanding” by the method of a differentiated consensus. This method allows the expression of both differences and consensus by placing the remaining differences within a still more far-reaching shared conviction. The JDDJ presents the different theological traditions but looks at them from the viewpoint of a common understanding as differences in emphasis and not in substance.

The WCRC was invited to associate with the document, and the 2010 Uniting General Council agreed, “To have a consultation within WCRC to consider the possibility of associating with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.” In the process of association, the associating organization is invited to:

- declare that on the basis of the JDDJ there is now a “common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ;”
- add its voice to the differentiated consensus and state that the different theological languages used to express the doctrine of justification in the light of this common understanding are not any longer church-dividing;
- express its own emphasis on the understanding of justification as a contribution to further ecumenical dialogue;
- affirm its commitment to strive together for the deepening of the common understanding of justification in theological study, teaching and preaching.

At its meeting in Havana, Cuba, in May 2016, the Executive Committee recommended to joyfully accept the invitation to associate with the JDDJ. In keeping with the Reformed principle, “*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum dei*” (“the church reformed, always reforming according to the

Word of God”), the Executive Committee embraced the new ecumenical reality this shared agreement promises. At the same time, the Executive Committee resolved that the Statement of Association should emphasize the connection between justification and justice as a Reformed contribution to future ecumenical dialogue on the understanding of justification.

A group of theologians reworked the text of the statement based on responses received from some churches and the partners and made more visible the Reformed contributions to the common understanding of justification. The headings that structure the document point to the particular Reformed emphasis that guides the WCRC’s association with the JDDJ:

- “We hear the consensus and agree.”
- “We particularly appreciate some of the distinctive insights in the JDDJ.”
- “The Reformed have particular emphases and additional insights to bring.”
- “We wish to underscore the integral relation between justification and justice.”

The last two points on the special Reformed emphasis focus on the Reformed understanding of law and gospel, the reliability of God’s promises, the place of good works among the justified and especially on the relation between justification and justice. This last part refers to the confessions of Accra and Belhar and quotes Calvin’s conviction that “believers truly worship God by the righteousness they maintain within their society.”

In the fall of 2016, general feedback on the JDDJ was solicited from member churches. Overall, the feedback was positive, and in December the officers approved to move forward with the official association to the document. Member churches are not bound to this association, but are, in fact, invited to have ecumenical discussions on the JDDJ on a regional level.

During this year’s General Council, a service that includes the association with the JDDJ will be held in Wittenberg. This is another important step on the way to Christian unity.

Other Ecumenical Work

As has been shown in the previous chapters, much of the work of the WCRC is ecumenical by nature, and the WCRC has many ecumenical partners with which it works on a wide variety of projects. And as also has been noted, since moving to Hannover the staff of the WCRC have had to more purposefully engage its Geneva-based ecumenical partners in the relationships that previously could be maintained by simply sharing the same hallways.

Outside of this regular ecumenical work, the majority of ecumenical engagement is centered in the office of the General Secretary. Some of this is regular, such as the annual Conference of Secretaries of World Christian Communion or attendance at assemblies of other ecumenical organizations (such as LWF and CWM). Some of this is more specialized, such as Chris Ferguson serving as a co-rapporteur of the World Council of Churches' Reference Group for the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.



General Secretary Chris Ferguson addresses the Ecumenical Forum on Peace in Northeast Asia held in Seoul, South Korea, in September 2015.

And much of this is event-specific. Here are but two examples of the many, many such events attended by the general secretary:

General Secretary Chris Ferguson was one of the presenters at the 2015 Congress of the Christians of the Middle East. The event was hosted by the Maronite League, a Lebanese association that supports Christians in the region. It gathered representatives from the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions for two days in order to bring worldwide attention to Christians in the Middle East who have been under constant persecution, particularly in Syria and Iraq, and to support Christians in the Middle East.

Ferguson attended the 30th International Meeting for Peace in Assisi, Italy, in September 2016 along with dozens of other religious leaders, including Christians, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists. The theme of the three-day meeting was “Thirst for Peace. Religions and Cultures in Dialogue” and concluded with an internationally broadcast, interreligious ceremony on the World Day of Prayer for Peace.

Please also see chapter 5 for additional information on dialogues with other Christian communions.



7

Transitions and Challenges

Transitions and Challenges

We believe in God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world. The WCRC finds itself in a new/renewed movement, with a rich heritage and facing critical challenges not only financially but also in terms of climate change, global injustices and needing spiritual renewal. The WCRC is called to prepare new wineskins into which the promised new wealth of our communion can expand. (2011 Strategic Plan)

In a world of constant change and ongoing challenges, it is a comfort to know that we are guided and protected by a living God whose love for us never changes. The 2010 Uniting General Council offered great hope for a united and productive future: the newly created WCRC, forged from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council, was “Called to Communion, Committed to Justice.” While much has been accomplished toward this end in the intervening years, there has also been struggle and difficult change. But God’s people have always been strugglers, and through this time of change and rebuilding, hope is again seen.

Financial Stresses

The two organizations that joined together to become the WCRC were no strangers to budgetary challenges. The plans and projections for merging the finances of the two organizations were delayed but ultimately successful, but they also included necessary cuts, including cuts to staffing, to both keep finances in line and to streamline the organization.

The Executive Committee, in its strategic plan, continued the commitment to fund the “core” of the organization through revenue from its member churches, while at the same time raising funds from other sources for specific programme work. In order to match the core budget to membership revenue and ensure fairness in the level of membership fees, a formula was created which took into account several factors, including the size of the church and international economic measures. This formula raised fees for some churches while lowering them for others. Unfortunately, not all member churches could meet this new fee structure, and the organization continued to be challenged to raise sufficient funds to meet its core budget.

The WCRC also faced a major challenge in currency fluctuations. For many years, only the US dollar was weakening against the Swiss franc. In 2010, the euro began to follow the same path. Swiss authorities took action to contain the slide against their currency, but because the WCRC received most of its income in euros or dollars, and most expenditures were in francs, the financial security of the WCRC became more precarious.

To compensate for these challenges, the WCRC again looked to other sources to secure funds. An addendum to the strategic plan included fundraising strategies “aimed at strengthening the resources of the WCRC for the following:

- 1. Developing resources that fund the WCRC vision and mission. This affects the overall fundraising efforts of the WCRC.*
- 2. Locating resources for the programmes. This is what ensures that the WCRC makes the impact it is poised for...*
- 3. Strengthening resources for the core budget. The member churches provide the bulk of this.*
- 4. Seek life gifts and other long-term gifts for the WCRC and its endowment fund.”*
(2011 Strategic Plan)

The May 2012 Executive Committee heard a report on “WCRC Sustainability Fund Initial Goals” which set regional fundraising targets and looked to the Council for World Mission (CWM) to assist with a significant grant. A new Director of Development would coordinate these initial efforts and, if successful, would continue working toward the ultimate goal of a sustainability fund—10,000,000 British pounds (or 14,000,000 francs)—to be raised within five years. This plan was agreed to by the Executive Committee, along with several other measures to ensure support for the fundraising effort.

The Director of Development laid out a plan in September 2012 to initiate the proposed work. By 2013, in his report to the Executive Committee, it was clear the plan could not be completed within the specified timeframe: “The goals that the Executive Committee adopted for the Sustainability Fund are extremely ambitious for an organization that has limited experience and infrastructure for funds development.” The Executive Committee also agreed that, “due to financial constraints, it was not able to continue the position of Fund Development Director.”

Despite this setback, an agreement was reached in 2014 with the Council for World Mission, which provided a seed grant of 1,000,000 pounds to the WCRC to help reach its goal of a 10,000,000 francs endowment (reset to be raised within the next six years). This grant has since been re-visioned with the CWM money redesignated as a capital stabilization grant. Regardless, the grant represented a renewal and strengthening of the overall mission partnership and common purpose between the WCRC and CWM. And by expressing confidence in the future of WCRC it helped attract other support, such as the Union of Evangelical Churches' (UEK) significant contribution of over 600,000 euros to rebuild the WCRC's overall financial reserves from near zero to the relatively healthy balance today (see chapter 8 for details).

After many studies, efforts and consultations, it became clear that a global endowment fundraising campaign was not going to be successful for a variety of reasons. Many areas of the world have never supported endowment campaigns. And in those regions that previously have been supportive of such campaigns, the appeal of contributing to an endowment has dropped significantly in recent years.

Finding a New Home

Without being able to create an endowment fund for operational expenses or find a significant source of new revenue, the organization was in an increasingly difficult financial situation. This concern had been raised at the Uniting General Council and a request made to consider a move from Geneva by the 2012 Executive Committee meeting. Anticipating this discussion, the officers were mandated by the 2011 Executive Committee "to make a recommendation on how the question [of a potential relocation] should be handled." The officers engaged in this mandate thoroughly and brought an extensive report to the 2012 Executive Committee. The Executive discussed its options and decided that the organization should physically relocate its offices from Geneva, gaining respite at least from the burdens of the strong franc. A task force was mandated to explore possible new locations, utilizing factors developed in the report from the officers and based on three critical criteria:

- Stewardship of limited resources
- Integrity to issues of justice
- Solidarity with member churches

A dozen cities in seven countries were initially researched as potential new locations. These countries were evaluated on cost of living, financial banking flexibility, political stability and freedom, human rights concerns and immigration policy. Further information was obtained on the specific cost of living indices through Mercer Global, as well as knowledgeable people on relocation and currencies.

After completing this research, the cities were ranked and three rose to the top for continuing consideration: Hannover, Germany, Johannesburg, South Africa and Utrecht, Netherlands. The chair of the task force travelled to each of the three cities and, with the help of member churches and partners, completed a detailed fact-finding exercise with an extensive checklist of issues the task force had identified as relevant. He also met with WCRC staff members, taking note of their insights, personal circumstances and organizational concerns.

In October 2012 the officers received the task force's detailed report that compared the three cities both with each other as well as with Geneva. After reviewing the report, the officers recommended that the WCRC relocate its offices to Hannover. In their report to the Executive Committee, the officers noted the following factors in this recommendation:

The German churches made a strong and enthusiastic case for Hannover. The welcome to the WCRC was offered in the context of a desire for celebrating and enhancing the Reformed contribution to church life in Germany.

The Federal and State governments offered to grant the WCRC status as a Corporation under Public Law which would enable the WCRC to enjoy significant freedom from immigration and employment regulations as well as exemption from certain Social Security taxes.

The Evangelical Reformed Church of Germany offered a very suitable office space at the Calvin Centre located in the centre of this thriving and attractive city that is readily accessible by public and private transportation.

The administrative offices of the EKD would provide assistance with financial and technology management. A sizeable International School operates in Hannover. The cost of living in Hannover is two thirds that of Geneva. The cost of living index measured Hannover as \$66 against Geneva's \$100. (Officers Report on Relocation, October 2012)

Practical and financial factors were not the only inputs considered for the proposed relocation. "While considerations for the move were mainly based on the critical financial situation of the WCRC, both the task force and the officers did some work on theological and symbolic considerations," concluding:

Information technologies have transformed the ways organizations work and relate to one another in the 21st century. In this sense, one city was as good as another for the WCRC offices, given a highspeed Internet connection. The WCRC is a worldwide family which will continue to hold meetings around the globe, drawing people together from across the continents. It is vitally important that this itinerant mode of operation should continue. The places we meet enable us to see issues from different perspectives. It is crucial to the vitality of the WCRC family that many churches have the opportunity to act as hosts as well as participants of our consultations.

Relocation should also reflect the values and commitments of the WCRC. Wherever its offices are located should enable the WCRC to articulate its message of justice—not merely one of responding to financial pressures.

The WCRC's Accra Confession, "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth" (2004) contributed to an analysis and a language that are now echoed around the world as people clamour for global economic justice and the safeguarding of creation. It noted that some people and places benefit, consciously or unconsciously, from the current neoliberal economic global system and named this as sin. As the WCRC continues to hold justice at the centre of its guiding principles, it seeks to embody a new ecumenical vision of radical equality and the empowerment of those who have been marginalised by unjust structures inside as well as outside the Church. This should be part of the WCRC's consciousness in any location.

In spite of the financial necessity that drives the current move, consciousness of the theological considerations ensure that the WCRC will never lose sight of its ecumenical commitments or its commitment to justice and prophetic witness no matter where it is located. The WCRC makes the move embracing God's future and with a resolve to be even more faithful in God's mission. (Officers Report on Relocation, October 2012)

The Executive Committee ratified the recommendation in November 2012, and also agreed that the move to Hannover should be completed by January 2014.

Staff and Operations

Even as the organization was preparing to relocate—and all the accompanying work that would require—the search for a new general secretary was experiencing its own challenges. A successor for Setri Nyomi needed to be found as his two-term limit was concluding in April 2014. A search committee was appointed by the 2012 Executive Committee but failed to find a candidate that they could recommend. During their meeting, the 2013 Executive Committee undertook an ad hoc discernment process in an attempt to find a candidate. This, too, ended without a successor, and another search committee was appointed, ultimately bringing a candidate to the 2014 Executive Committee.

Chris Ferguson (United Church of Canada) was elected and installed as general secretary at the May 2014 meeting. At the same meeting Nyomi was thanked for his service, which had been extended until September 1. Ferguson himself began his duties in Hannover that August, providing a transitional month between the two.

The general secretary was not the only staff position to change. The executive secretary for communications decided to return to Canada rather than move to Hannover, and a search for her successor was conducted in the last half of 2013, with the new executive, Phil Tanis (Reformed Church in America), beginning his term in February 2014—after the completion of the move to Hannover.



The WCRC staff team (including interns) in Geneva in 2013 (from left to right): Ida Milli, Stephens Lytch, Páraic Réamonn, Daphne Martin-Gnanadason, Kristine Greenaway, Setri Nyomi, Douwe Visser, Viktória Kóczian, Frans du Plessis, Dora Arce-Valentin and Aiko Sumichan.

None of the administrative support staff based in Switzerland made the move to Germany, and as they left in the final year, their positions were not re-filled, creating a strain on capacities, especially as work for the relocation needed to happen. And the finance coordinator was not retained, as the responsibilities for that position were reorganized, through a combination of assistance from the Evangelical Reformed Church (Germany)—including payroll, systems and supervision—and hiring an administrative assistant for finance.¹

Taken together, this produced first a gap in and then an ongoing loss of institutional memory. Systems could not be maintained as usual during the relocation process. And with only three executive staff moving from Geneva—and one of those being Nyomi who left shortly after the completion of the move—routines and basic knowledge was lost. In addition, foundational pieces of the operations had to be changed: a new accounting system had to be utilized and the database, which had been tied to that of the World Council of Churches in the Ecumenical Centre, needed to be replaced.

¹ Staff who served the WCRC in various years from 2011-2016 include these who have concluded their service: Kristine Greenaway (executive secretary for communications); Yueh Cho (finance coordinator); Páraic Réamonn (Partnership Fund coordinator); Hartmut Lucke (translator/interpreter); Antoinette Visser (Partnership Fund assistant); administrative assistants: Penny Blachut, Claudia Duval, Daphne Martin-Gnanadason, Viktória Kóczian, Ida Milli.



Above, President Jerry Pillay is flanked by the out-going and in-coming general secretaries: Setri Nyomi and Chris Ferguson.

On the right, the current and former financial coordinators Gerhard Plenter and Yueh Cho.



Thus, in many ways, the WCRC, with its long and deep history, was a brand new organization, especially administratively. Bringing these systems up to speed and settling into its new home took longer than anyone anticipated.

And changes continue: Douwe Visser is taking early retirement in August 2017 following an extended medical leave. Visser served as executive secretary for theology and ecumenical engagement in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches prior to the 2010 merger, and has served as the WCRC's executive secretary for theology, mission, and communion since. Dora Arce-Valentin, who began serving as the WCRC's executive secretary for justice and partnership in 2012 from an office in Cuba, relocated to Geneva in 2013, and then transitioned to the office in Hannover, will conclude her term of service at the end of this year. A search process has already begun for both positions, with the hope that successors for both will be able to begin by January 2018.²

² Current staff members (not yet named) are: Aruna Gnanadason (consultant for theology), Gerhard Plenter (finance coordinator), Paul Oppenheim (special projects), Werner Joecker (Reformed Partnership Fund assistant), Moon-Kee Kim (coordinator for peace and development), Anna Krüger (assistant for finance and communications), Hanns Lessing (general council coordinator), Katrina Mertz (assistant to the general secretary), Amritha Perumalla (assistant for theology and justice).



Members of the Executive Committee, along with guests, at the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon's retreat centre in Dhour Choueir, Lebanon.

New Ways of Working

The move to Hannover is the biggest factor in the Communion's relative financial stability. At the most basic level, the new financial coordinator reported to the 2015 Executive Committee that a financial analysis already made clear that the WCRC would not have survived if it had remained in Geneva (see chapter 8 for more details). Despite continuing the work to stabilize income for the core budget, the increase in the reserves and very successful fundraising for the General Council budget show that a corner has been turned. Even in this difficult global economic context, the WCRC is poised to move into the future. Since 2014 there has been a considerable increase in support to the Reformed Partnership Fund. In addition to the excellent support of *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World), the *Otto per Mille* (Eight in One Thousand) programme of the Tavola Waldense has given a substantial three year grant for the fund, along with money for WCRC justice programmes and global peace and reconciliation initiatives. The *Evangelische Missionswerk* (EMW) continues to increase its annual support for mission initiatives. And the Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), along with CWM, have provided critical support to the justice and partnership office.

The understanding voiced in the officer's report about the impact of new technologies has also proven true. Between virtual communication, a dedicated effort to hold meetings throughout the world and the general secretary's strategic commitment to accompany member churches in critical work, the WCRC's office location has mattered less than previously. Casual connections with ecumenical partners based solely on being in the same building in Geneva are now purposeful projects that engage the WCRC in only the most critical processes.

The impact of the move as noted above is far beyond the financial and organizational response to a financial crisis. The move from Geneva continues to raise many questions. For many the identity with the organization's historical roots has suffered. Many in Swiss member churches strongly opposed the idea. Perhaps these concerns can be best summed up by returning to the Officers Report on Relocation:

Genesis 12 sees the call to Abraham through whom all the world is to be blessed. It is our conviction that the pain of the departure from Geneva represents the birth pangs of a new ecumenical age. We pondered a Spirit who regularly seems to initiate new projects before the old ones are complete. Jacob thought that he was leading his people into Egypt to save them from famine, but with hindsight it is clear that God had a larger project in mind. When Jesus set his face for Jerusalem, the modest, local agenda of his Galilean ministry was taken up into a mission of cosmic proportions. The early Church discovered that its calling was not to be a reform movement within Judaism as first imagined but an inclusive family of faith the likes of which the world had never seen. We human beings prefer to finish one thing before we start the next. But the Spirit of God is always well ahead of us, urgent and impatient to release the Kingdom of God among us, giving birth to a future that we strain to glimpse.

We trust that God continues to guide us so that now from our new location we continue to live out the call to communion and commitment to justice, as we seek God's renewal and transformation, through the grace of Jesus Christ and the leading of the Spirit.

Finances



8

Finances

To strengthen our communion, we need to ensure that all are contributing, and that resources are shared equitably and invested well: fruitfully and ethically. This includes financial, human and other resources. While the resources exist for the WCRC to be the Communion God wants us to be, resources need to be identified and accessed for the life and work of the communion. As a family the WCRC needs to be sharing resources with each other, and to be creating a culture of sharing. „Where our treasure is, our heart will be also,“ therefore every part of the Communion should be strongly encouraged to contribute financially as well as in other valuable ways. (2011 Strategic Plan)

The World Communion of Reformed Churches derives its operating income primarily from its member churches. In fact, it has been a long-standing goal of the organization to fund its core expenses—personnel, operational, communications and travel—solely through membership fees, with money for projects and programmes coming from additional fundraising.

This goal has not yet been reached, despite continuing attempts to encourage all members to pay their fair share. The fees assessed to member churches are based on a “fair contribution” formula adopted by the Executive Committee in 2012 that takes into account both the size of church (number of members) and the GDP per capita of the country in which the church is based. This creates a neutral, “theoretical contribution capacity” that can still be augmented regionally based on member churches’ abilities to pay. In other words, as the report on the formula states, “Within a region, it can be agreed to grant special adjustments to member churches of the region. This can be a deduction for those who constitute recognized minorities in their home country or a member church which enjoys good growth (as a way of encouragement). It can also be an increase under some specific circumstances” (2012 Executive Committee Minutes).

After creating the formula, the minimum membership fee of 500 US dollars was confirmed (having been set previous to the Uniting General Council). It should be noted that the new formula had an impact in several churches—raising their fees considerably—and that not all churches are yet contributing to this level.

As has been noted previously (see chapter 7), the WCRC experienced severe financial challenges in the time since the Uniting General Council. The amount of money coming in from membership fees continued a steady decline throughout this time period. This was exacerbated by the dramatic increase in the strength of the Swiss franc.

MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS BY REGION

Region	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	in CHF	in CHF	in EUR	in EUR	in EUR	in EUR
Africa	67,403	92,046	48,556	35,394	15,313	47,787
Latin America	4,176	28,421	4,784	8,488	4,159	5,521
CANAAC	249,348	341,847	227,508	230,028	275,951	265,268
Asia	54,092	210,925	60,770	53,902	59,909	56,378
Pacific	4,705	37,522	12,054	4,720	3,714	3,844
Europe	662,392	703,692	510,646	468,230	473,013	401,523
Total in CHF	1,042,116	1,414,453				
Total in EUR	846,719	1,173,565	864,319	800,761	832,059	780,321

The WCRC also maintains several reserve funds. The majority of these, at least in 2011, were earmarked funds—meaning that they had to be spent on particular projects, including all of our programme projects, the General Council, the Reformed Partnership Fund and others. The “rainy day” fund, which assists the organization in the event of a financial crisis, was critically low in 2011.

RESERVE FUNDS

Funds	2012	2016
	in EUR	in EUR
Earmarked	1,215,000	1,704,000
Rainy day	152,000	2,355,000
Total	1,367,000	4,059,000

Even as the WCRC contemplated its move from Geneva, efforts were underway to increase the reserves, especially that of the “rainy day” fund. Through contributions by German churches, most notably the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK), and the Council for World Mission, this was successfully accomplished, and the WCRC now sits on financially secure footing, despite the ongoing challenges of raising sufficient funds for its core operations.

INCOME

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	in CHF	in CHF	in EUR	in EUR	in EUR	in EUR
Membership						
contributions	1,042,116	1,414,453	864,319	800,761	832,059	780,321
Extra contributions						
for reserves	-	362,190	143,989	1,411,500	300,284	6,719
Others	342,637	410,476	367,567	413,875	418,445	768,255
Total	1,384,753	2,187,119	1,375,876	2,626,136	1,550,788	1,555,294

From a financial point of view, moving the WCRC from Geneva to Hannover has been a success. This can be seen most obviously in “personnel costs.” With the cost of living in Hannover a third lower than that of Geneva, cost savings have been found simply by not needing to pay personnel as much. It should be noted, however, that there were staffing adjustments between Geneva and Hannover, as well. The fulltime, executive-level position of financial coordinator is now undertaken by a combination of a volunteer financial coordinator, an administrative financial assistant (on WCRC staff) with payroll services provided by the Evangelical Reformed Church (Germany).

EXPENSE

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	in CHF	in CHF	in EUR	in EUR	in EUR	in EUR
Personnel costs	868,001	852,699	844,257	522,634	517,682	558,411
Others (mainly operational costs)	410,063	864,700	315,250	549,054	318,677	667,319
Contributions for reserves						
(incl. extra and own contr.)	81,443	444,979	193,446	1,531,036	690,778	309,488
Contributions from European						
membership fees for WCRC						
Europe Trust Account	25,246	24,741	22,923	23,411	23,651	20,076
Total	1,384,753	2,187,119	1,375,876	2,626,136	1,550,788	1,555,294

Apart from the core budget, the WCRC funds projects primarily from its two programme offices (but also through the general secretariat). The executive secretaries for the programmes, along with supporting staff, carry out projects and consultations as mandated by the General Council. For this, they do their own fundraising, and work is only carried out if funding is available to cover the costs. An example of the types of work carried out and funded by the programme offices is shown in the chart below.

PROJECT EXPENDITURES IN 2016

Funds	Amount	Percentage
	in EUR	in %
GIT	54,632	9
Theological Dialogues	12,960	2
Mission	30,587	5
Georges Lombard Prize	47	0
Accra +10	23,113	4
Oikotree	795	0
NIFEA	54,776	9
Gender Justice	2,535	0
TESF	9,306	2
Women Ordination	9,659	2
Reformed Partnership Fund	249,493	40
Regional Empowerment	50,268	8
Global Internship Programme	58,014	9
Global Initiatives -		
Korea Reunification Process	17,165	3
Global Initiatives -		
Peace and Reconciliation Colombia	41,995	7
Total	615,344	100

The Reformed Partnership Fund receives funding from *Brot für die Welt* (Germany), the *Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen* (the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, Germany) and the *Otto per Mille* programme of the *Unione delle Chiese Metodiste e Valdesi* (Union of the Methodist and Waldensian churches in Italy), as well as specific but occasional contributions from other donors. Through the Reformed Partnership Fund the WCRC provides small grants and other resources to churches that carry out mission-related projects important to the life of a church and its surrounding community, particularly in the Global South.

The *Otto per Mille* grant also provides funding for the NIFEA (New International Financial and Economic Architecture, see chapter 4) programme and the Global Peace Initiatives.

Stablized but Challenges Continue

Despite ongoing budget challenges, it is anticipated that the 2017 budget will not run a deficit. However, unless additional funds can be raised or costs cut (which is very difficult given the amount of money needed to fund fixed expenses) it is anticipated that budget challenges will continue into the foreseeable future. This will thus have to be a priority for the next Executive Committee to address. Thankfully the organization is in a much better position financially than it was even four years ago and is no longer under existential threat.

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