

General Secretary's Report

Rev. Dr. Chris Ferguson

1. Giving thanks to the Living God I begin my report by affirming that the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) on its many levels is embracing the call for renewal embodied in our General Council theme, "Living God, renew and transform us." Thanks to the faithfulness, prayer, hard work and dedication of the officers, Executive Committee, staff, regional councils and member churches we are, despite considerable past and ongoing challenges, moving forward with renewed vigour on many fronts. The call to renewal and transformation has inspired us not to conform but to turn around and renew ourselves for our mission.
2. As a World Communion we are all aware that our entire world—people and planet—are in a crisis that engulfs our life together in all its dimensions; politically, economically, socially, culturally, religiously, ecologically, militarily and gender equality with massive threats to life, sustainability and wellbeing. In this we continue to see that the inequity, systemic racism, war, poverty and violence are deeply rooted in and driven by inherently unjust and ecologically destructive economic and financial systems that work against the "life abundant for all" that is at the core of the mission of Jesus Christ and therefore our own (John 10:10, Luke 4:16ff).
3. We begin with our turning to the Living God, and in that prayer and confession we reject all systems, ideologies, regimes and idols that impose domination, division, destruction, despair, suffering and death over God's creation (Jeremiah 10:10, the Belhar and Accra confessions).
4. We lift up the vitality and joy shared as the churches of the WCRC witness to the life-giving and liberating Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of world-shaking challenges, crises and contexts.
5. These last few years have seen a deepening and worsening of this all-embracing global crisis beyond the long list of terrible and terrifying events and crises that impact specific places, sectors, classes, genders and contexts. We see the writing on the wall and are just now grasping the true global dimension of the crisis—and from that deep place we cry out to God to renew us for the transformation of the world. I will return to this later.
6. The report *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* outlines the realities, challenges and accomplishments of the last seven years, as does the president's report. I will not repeat all the details here in my report, but commend both for your study and reception. I will offer the highlights of the journey in the last seven years, but I will briefly focus on the last two and a half years and will emphasize the challenges and vision for the future.
7. Before going any further, I must give thanks to God for the gifts of this WCRC family and specifically for the vision, leadership, faithfulness and dedication and commitment of all those who have worked, prayed and gone the second mile to bring us to where we are today.
8. Specifically, I must express the deepest appreciation for the ministry, leadership and service of Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi. Thanks to his graciousness and diligence the handover of leadership was smooth. And every day we see the fruits of his fourteen years of leadership. There is fulsome testimony in the pages of *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* of his guiding influence in the consolidation of the journey of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) to together become "called to communion and committed to justice." Deepest thanks, Setri!
9. A special word of gratitude and appreciation is due to the WCRC's first president, Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay. His exceptional gifts of theologically rooted, visionary leadership have upheld and oriented the WCRC and its Executive in moving forward in the face of significant challenges in the last seven years. I add also my personal word of appreciation to President Pillay who has made a very special effort to guide and support me.
10. The officers deserve the grateful thanks of the whole Communion as this journey presented them with unexpected twists and turns. They, with the whole Executive, have displayed faithful leadership and creativity in confronting the very difficult financial situation which led them to make the courageous decision to move the global offices of the WCRC from Geneva to Hannover. Early in the process there was a change in general treasurers: with Rev. Dr. Gottfried Löcher not able to continue, Dr. Johann Weusmann was elected. His financial and visionary leadership and fundraising ability are superlative, and the WCRC simply would not be in our current stable situation without his timeless efforts.

11. The Executive acted resolutely and decisively to ensure that the WCRC could survive financially and face the tough reality that we could no longer sustain offices and staff salaries in one of the most expensive cities in the world. To leave the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva with its rich and important, historical and ecumenical significance was wrenching. Bold leadership was needed to ensure that financial stability would be ensured and ecumenical relationships were maintained.
12. The move to Hannover was made possible by the extraordinary generosity and vision of the Reformed Alliance in Germany and the support of German member churches—and most graciously due to the special efforts and financial gifts of the United Evangelical Churches (UEK), who in fact are not members of the WCRC, but who faithfully and consistently make significant contributions of people, money and encouragement. The support of churches like the United Churches of Westphalia and the Rhineland are especially worthy of mention. Without the vision and determination of the leadership of the Reformed Alliance, the successful move to Germany would have been impossible. The Reformed Alliance's vision and commitment have been at the base of the successful transition to Hanover.
13. In the midst of the financial crisis, extra efforts were made by mission councils and churches to ensure that funding was secured to allow for the support of the justice and partnership office. The financial report in *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* notes these very important contributions without which the WCRC simply would not have been able to support our own justice work. This was not only for special programmes, but also the core budget support for staff, that the membership contributions were not sufficient to cover.
14. In those years of financial crisis and the move to Hannover, there was great pressure on and disruption to the staff team. The move and financial instability took a tremendous toll on staff. For various reasons some executive staff decided not to make the move. I will say more in appreciation of the contributions of staff below. But here I want to register that one side effect of the move was the disruption to the staff team and to the systems, procedures, and administration of the global office. Thanks to the exceptional dedication of many staff, we have now overcome most of these challenges.
15. Special mention and great appreciation must be made for the grace-filled generosity and unprecedented support to the WCRC by the Council for World Mission (CWM) and in particular its general secretary, Rev. Dr. Collin Cowan. After in-depth consultation, the WCRC and CWM articulated a common commitment to mission values and vision. With almost all CWM churches also being members of the WCRC, beyond that obvious link, the CWM discerned the leadership and contribution of the WCRC in justice and theology so significant for their own work, that they expressed that support for partnership through a capital donation of 1 million British pounds.
16. The CWM capital donation and the special UEK contribution, along with others, have meant that the WCRC has gone from a nearly bankrupt organization with almost no reserves to a relatively stable, ecumenical organization with a growing base of reserves. These contributions represent a clear affirmation of the importance and relevance of the WCRC as a global family "called to communion and committed to justice."
17. Given the WCRC's global network of churches and firm commitment to justice and unity, the *Fondation pour l'aide au protestantisme réformé* (FAP), the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church (USA), ICCO Cooperation, *Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland* (EMW,) *Otto per Mille* of the *Tavola Valdese*, *Brot für die Welt* and others have all partnered with the WCRC in significant ways to support programmes and activities, including those for justice, mission, theological dialogues, peace and reconciliation and communications, as well as the Reformed Partnership Fund.
18. The *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* report highlights the important work done in the period from 2010 to 2017. And yet it must be noted that the lofty objectives of the strategic plan and the key directions set out in it were often overtaken by the need to attend to the financial crisis. The scarcity of resources that required the move to Hannover inevitably caused the turbulence and disruption any such move brings to staff, administration, and relationships. In addition, and at the same time, the second term of the general secretary drew to a close, and the Executive found themselves in a prolonged search for new leadership. This was a turbulent period from 2011-2014, and meant that many of the goals of the strategic plan went unfulfilled.
19. With the move to Hannover complete, the financial reserves stabilized, some new sources of programme funds on hand and new leadership in place, attention could be given to re-establishing the administrative and financial systems disrupted by the move, as well as re-building the staff team. Intensive efforts were made to reconnect to member churches that felt some distance during the transition period. Special efforts were made to reconnect

creatively to the ecumenical family, some of whom felt the move from the Ecumenical Centre had meant a cooling of ecumenical commitments on the part of the WCRC. More will be said of this below.

20. In 2016 at the Executive Committee meeting in Havana, Cuba, the WCRC was in a position to evaluate its strategic plan. The assessment, given the challenges outlined above, was: “We are moving forward and are better placed than in recent years to focus on the high vision of the plan.” But at the same time: “We all see we are not where we need to be with one year left before the 2017 General Council and must discern well what we can accomplish together well in the remaining time.”
21. Significant efforts were made to overcome the distractions and challenges and “to put the WCRC back on the map” with many of our member churches, regions and within the ecumenical community—through extensive visits and contributions to key events and occasions by the president, general secretary and staff; through well-received consultations and networking; and through renewed participation in ecumenical processes. We are slowly re-establishing our relationships and impact with some who felt us far from them in the last number of years. Through participation in situations of conflict and discord, and accompanying churches as mediators and facilitators, we have advanced in building up the true meaning of communion in key places and spaces. In the last two years, we have been making a qualitative shift and are receiving clear and growing feedback that our leadership and renewed communication is being felt and appreciated.
22. Also at its Havana meeting the Executive adopted revisions to the strategic plan to focus on key goals for the remaining time leading to the General Council. The plan identified key outcomes in each of the five key directions outlined in the strategic plan so that the WCRC could move forward with its stated goals while contributing to and assuring a successful General Council. The Executive affirmed that the General Council is not an end in itself but will, if successful, contribute to carrying out the core vision and mission of the WCRC in both consolidating communion and advancing the justice God calls for. In addition to ongoing programmes the specific strategic foci for the five key directions during final pre-Council period were:
 23. Mission: To move forward towards the second “Mission in the Frontlines” event. This is to accompany member churches in the context of religion, violence and peacebuilding, along with an inter-religious cooperation dimension, with special attention to Middle Eastern and African churches. This will be done with all WCRC desks involved. The planning meeting was held in 2016 and the event will be held in Lebanon in 2018.
 24. Communion: Urgent need to follow up on the 2014 Communion Consultation with two foci: 1) A consultation with the regional leaders and the officers was held in February 2017. It was very successful in helping focus on imperative improvements in the relationships with regions and regional councils. The WCRC through the new Executive Committee must implement the recommendations for changes in working styles, communication and resources while resolving issues about the number of regional councils and the relationship of the regions to member churches and the whole of the WCRC. A report on the consultation is available on the WCRC website.
 25. 2) The issue of human sexuality has been long identified as both a church-dividing and a communion-dividing issue. It is proposed to convene a “Consultation on Communion and Human Sexuality” to provide a safe space and opportunity in mutual respect in the spirit of communion to explore how the WCRC can ensure that we maintain and deepen our unity in the face of our differences while drawing on the gifts and theological and biblical perspectives from our Reformed traditions. The goal is not to come to a common position on an issue but to find ways to ensure our differences do not divide us and that justice is pursued. The consultation is planned for late November and will be hosted by the Church of South India.
 26. Justice: The key goal was the re-launching of the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative. A series of meetings were held to plan the WCRC’s contribution and to reinvigorate the ecumenical partnerships. These were successful, and NIFEA is now refocused and its relaunch secured. The justice goals included a reviving of the Justice Network to help prepare a vision for justice work beyond 2017. You will see the fruits of that work at this Council. The gender justice work focused on the full participation of women in the ministry and leadership of the church. A task group has prepared a presentation for this Council with a proposed declaration endorsed by the Executive Committee. The other key focus was to ensure that this General Council achieved the required equity and gender balances for delegations. This process has gone fairly well despite internal contradictions within the constitutional stipulations as explained in another part of my report.
 27. Theology: A key priority for 2016 was the preparation of the Global Institute of Theology held just before and then along with the Council. Participants in the GIT are attending and will be contributing to the discussions and activities

here. For 2016 we identified follow-up and continuity in our ecumenical dialogues. Another theology priority was the consultation process on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) discussed in several parts of this report. This has been a significant reactivation of our ecumenical involvement. On the same note is the follow-up to the Lutheran–Reformed dialogue bearing fruit in the Wittenberg Witness. This, too, is a sign of solid reconnection and forward movement with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). Both the general secretariat and the theology desk have been involved in this work. Progress has been very positive especially considering significant staff challenges.

28. Ecumenical Engagement: my leadership in the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP) and more emphasis on WCRC participation in the PJP was a priority, as well as more focus on ecumenical collaboration on key public witness, advocacy and accompaniment foci, specifically:
 - a. Peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula, working with the Presbyterian Church of Korea, Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, National Council of Churches in Korea, World Council of Churches and Korean Christian Federation (KCF). This resulted in a WCRC delegation to North Korea in 2016. KCF delegates are present at this meeting, and the WCRC is hosting a meeting of the Ecumenical Forum on Korea directly after the Council.
 - b. Supporting member churches in the Colombian peace process, including my direct involvement in ecumenical diplomacy, visits and advocacy including a visit with Colombia's president.
 - c. Supporting member churches in the Middle East through pastoral visits and interfaith meetings. Partners include the Middle East Council of Churches and Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches.
 - d. South Sudan and Nigeria: With the Africa Communion of Reformed Churches and member churches we are organizing a pastoral visit to South Sudan later this year. A visit to member churches in Nigeria coincided with a meeting with the WCC PJP.
 - e. Strengthening direct relations with other communions especially in light of the 500 year Reformation(s) commemorations. I attended the Anglican Consultative Council in April 2017. In June 2016 a WCRC delegation had an audience with Pope Francis and met the Pontifical Councils on Christian Unity and on Justice and Peace. In November 2017 we will have a meeting to begin conversations with the Mennonites. We are in conversations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate about resuming ecumenical dialogues with them.
29. There has also been steady progress in addressing the organizational and administrative challenges of transferring and setting up the appropriate systems and structure for the effective operation of the WCRC's office in Hannover. It has taken time to put the financial systems in place and address serious inherited weaknesses and problems. The last two extremely positive audit reports testify to this progress—with great thanks to the finance staff team and the extraordinary efforts of the general treasurer.
30. With the convening of this General Council, we are just at the last phase—although not yet perfect—of overcoming significant challenges with the database and records management. Despite several glitches, the record number of registered delegates to this meeting bears testimony to the fact that we are in much better shape than in the last number of years.
31. The many challenges listed above have put a great deal of pressure on the staff team. Appended to this report is a list of those who have served the WCRC in the last seven years. A special note must be made of the changes in the executive staff team since Grand Rapids.
32. Executive Secretary for Communications Kristine Greenaway decided not to make the move to Hannover. We are extremely grateful to Kristine for her long service and significant contribution and also give special thanks to the United Church of Canada who supported her in her position at the WCRC. Philip Tanis of the Reformed Church in America was appointed as executive secretary of communications in 2014. Phil has not only made significant and highly appreciated contributions in communications and publications but has drawn on his experience to support and consolidate the administrative and management systems for the staff team.
33. The Rev. Dr. Douwe Visser, the executive secretary for theology, mission and communion faced serious health problems, resulting in extended medical leave and requested early retirement, which will take effect as of August 1. We are pleased to report that Douwe's surgeries were successful, and he is doing well. We wish to express our gratitude to Douwe, who was not only a long-serving theology secretary for WARC and the WCRC, but as a former president of the REC, co-chaired over the agreements for the WARC and REC together, giving birth to the WCRC. We give thanks to God for his vision and his leadership. Dr. Aruna Gnanadason of the Church of South India has generously taken on the challenges serving as the consultant to theology, mission and communion during Douwe's

absence, working from her home in Chennai, India. Her major focus has been the organizing of the Global Institute of Theology. She has also been the steady hand guiding the ongoing ecumenical dialogues. We are so grateful and appreciative for her coming to our aid on short notice and doing such excellent work, adding so much to the staff team.

34. In addition to the regular three executive secretaries elected by the Executive Committee, the WCRC has been blessed by the dedicated and highly effective service of the Rev. Dr. Hanns Lessing as our General Council coordinator. By now, Hanns will be well known to you all. It is important to note that on top of the formidable task of coordinating the planning and running of the Council (with a very small staff, which was also short one full time executive) Hanns has along with Aruna played an important role helping the WCRC move forward with two crucial ecumenical consultations during the medical leave of Douwe Visser: the association with the JDDJ and the Wittenberg Witness (a follow up to the Reformed–Lutheran Dialogue, *On Being the Church*). Hanns has gone far beyond the second mile in the planning of this Council and has been an important and fully contributing member of our executive staff team. Special thanks are due to him and the United Church of Westphalia which generously and without reserve seconded Hanns for this role and provided this salary as one of their highly significant contributions to the success of the Council.
35. Since relocating to Germany, the WCRC has changed the structure of its finance office in response to financial constraints. Presently, the office is comprised of Gerhard Plenter, who is the volunteer financial coordinator, seconded as a consultant to oversee the professional functioning of the finance team, working with Anna Krüger, the finance administrative assistant. Again, a very special word of thanks to Gerhard and his church, the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany, for the unfailing support and service to the WCRC. The EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany) also provides consultancy services in the area of human resources and legal advice in the absence of WCRC staff capacity. Again these exceptional efforts by the German churches have made the move from Geneva possible.
36. Rev. Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth served as Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership until 2011. Patricia left a strong legacy of work and witness for justice and partnership for which the WCRC gives thanks to God. Rev. Dora Arce-Valentin took over from Pat in 2012. Dora has served the WCRC faithfully with remarkable perseverance in a five-year period during which she moved twice, worked out of three different countries and had to face a scarcity of resources to carry out enormously challenging tasks. Dora's dedication and steadfastness as a colleague and team-worker are greatly appreciated. The Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women to be presented to this Council stands in strong testimony to Dora's much appreciated witness to gender justice and the relationship between justice and communion. Dora will complete her five-year term as executive secretary for justice and partnership in December 2017 and will return to serve the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba, leaving a strong legacy of service and commitment to justice.
37. The staff team that served the WCRC until 2014 and who did not make the move to Hannover deserve our most profound thanks. The staff colleagues who formed the initial team in the transition to Hannover merit special mention for the difficult task of transition.
38. We give thanks to God that after much change and challenge the WCRC is now blessed with a staff team which is working well with incredible dedication and purpose even in the face of staff shortages due to illness and transitions, not to mention the monumental task of bringing the financial, database and administrative systems up to speed; planning and supporting an impressive array of programmes, consultations and meetings and not least of all the effective support for the planning and success of this Council. They do indeed deserve the heartfelt thanks of the WCRC for their extraordinary dedication and service!
39. In response to the two vacancies created by Douwe Visser's early retirement and the conclusion of Dora Arce-Valentin's term, the Executive Committee appointed a search committee made up of the officers plus Ms. Omega Bula and Chair Dr. Anna Case-Winters to nominate persons to fill the two vacant executive secretary positions. That committee has done its work, and the Executive Committee will receive that report. There is the expectation that excellent and highly qualified people will be in place by 1 January 2018.
40. While lifting up the special leadership of the president, the general treasurer, the former general secretary and your staff team, I allow myself the opportunity to draw your attention to the work of the Executive Committee and as well as the leadership of the officers. As my report shows—and *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* illustrates—the last seven years have been filled with obstacles, challenges and crises. But it should also be breathtakingly clear that God blessed the WCRC with an Executive Committee willing and able with the help of Holy Spirit to meet the challenges,

overcome the obstacles, find solutions and against all odds allow the WCRC to be of significant value to its member churches, as well as make an important contribution ecumenically in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and faithfully to the God of Life! I have only come on board after the hard decisions had been made, so I believe I am in a good position to say how well the WCRC has been served by the Executive and its officers. An obvious example is the effective planning and carrying out of this Council in the midst of turbulence and transition. While far from perfect and short of all that was hoped, the forward movement has been significant. A special mention must be made of the General Council Planning Committee and the vision and leadership of its chair, Rev. Dr. Lisa Vander Wal. Thanks be to God!

41. The unfinished agenda, the ongoing challenges and new ones arising from the crises facing the rapidly changing global reality are enormous. I would point to three frames within which we can see our present situation as the WCRC: 1) the context of the 500 year Reformation(s) commemorating the immediate reality of the WCRC as “called to communion, committed to justice;” 2) the frame of our particular challenges as WCRC with only seven years of life together as a communion and 3) the context of a rapidly changing, if not deteriorating, global situation in a world fallen among thieves. The overall theological and biblical lens for our reflection on these interlocking and entangled contexts can be our General Council theme, “Living God, renew and transform us,” which is at one and the same time a prayer, a confession and expression of public witness.
42. The following brief reflections are no more than possible markers for the corporate reflection of the whole WCRC Communion.
43. The 500 year commemoration of the Protestant Reformation(s) coincides within the reality that the current global crisis is revealing a change of “epoch,” a change of the dominant and prevailing so-called “civilizational paradigm.” For the WCRC we have the task of reflecting on the traditions and plural heritages and multiple identities of the various Reformation movements that make up the complex reality that is often simply called the Protestant Reformation. The year 2017 and October 31st has become the common focus for Protestants and the ecumenical community to commemorate the whole complex historical and theological heritage. For the WCRC family we have felt a special obligation over the years to lift up the specific contribution of Calvin, Knox, Zwingli and others, including the celebration of the “Calvin Year” in 2009. In addition we celebrate and lift up the first Reformation movement traditions of Jan Huss and Pierre Waldo and the many others. Along with the obviously key contributions of Luther and the German Reformers we need to lift up the contributions from other countries and insist on the foregrounding of the role of women Reformers such as Katharina von Bora, Marie Dentière, Marguerite de Navarre, Argula von Grumbach.
44. In taking our Reformation and Protestantism seriously we must reflect critically as a WCRC family on the Reformed principle of a “Reformed church always reforming according to the Word of God.” We are in fact rooted in Reformed tradition but actively reforming and transforming the meaning of that living tradition.
45. The World Communion of Reformed Churches includes Reformed and Presbyterian churches, but also congregational churches, Czech Brethren, Moravian, Waldensian and United and Uniting churches. The Reformed tradition is not simply a description of what was inherited from the 16th century and before, but a living, emerging tradition as we are bringing ecumenical richness and the call to specific and sometimes narrowly Reformed identities into new expressions through the influence of the many branches in our family tree, and particularly the complex and multiple identities of the many United and Uniting churches who are integral to our life and witness as the WCRC. For many of our churches, their identities include a firm rooting in the living Reformed tradition, but also with ecumenical bodies like the WCC and other communions, such as the Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and so on! Most importantly, the majority of churches in our living tradition live, move and have their being in the Global South!
46. For the WCRC, as for WARC and REC before it, fundamental to our self-understanding is that to live in the Reformed tradition is to be ecumenical. To situate ourselves within the Protestant family is to fully embrace the ecumenical imperative. We commemorate rather than simply celebrate the 500 years because the memories include the Reformed tradition’s contribution to division, disunity, conflict and even persecution not only of other Christians, but of people of other faiths. We uphold the key distinctive of the Reformed contributions with the pillars of Protestant theology and practice while confessing the sin of divisive violence and excessive denominationalism. The year 2017 is a significant moment for us to re-invigorate our response to the imperative of Christian unity and loving solidarity with all of humanity and the whole of creation (John 3:16, John 10:10, John 17:21)

47. Holding our General Council in Germany in 2017 is a special opportunity to bring the Reformation tradition into the present tense. We are called to acknowledge the sins and shortcomings of the past and lift up the distinctive gifts of our tradition in order to faithfully witness to the Living God as part of the church of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray and work for the transformation of a world “groaning in travail” as all of creation is faced with massive threats to life.
48. In the call to bring our distinctive witness as the WCRC and the living Reformed tradition to both the cause of Christian unity and witnessing to a broken and unjust world without peace, we have focused in the last three years on two specific opportunities for ecumenical witness in this special Reformation focus year.
49. We followed the mandate of the 2010 Uniting General Council “to have a consultation within the WCRC to consider the possibility of associating with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.” After a process of consultation, the Executive Committee decided in May 2016 to joyfully accept the invitation to associate with the JDDJ and to emphasize the connection between justification and justice as a Reformed contribution to the ecumenical understanding of justification. This means adding a Reformed voice and commitment to the document signed by the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation in 1999. The Methodists have also associated, and the Anglican Communion has affirmed and welcomed the JDDJ. We will celebrate our association together in the context of this Council during our day in Wittenberg on July 5. This is an important signal of our commitment to Christian unity and our determination to recognize our differences—but to ensure that we do not let reconcilable differences divide us.
50. As a Reformation tradition which has played a role in division and growing denominationalism, we now exercise our vocation for bringing Reformation into the present tense as a force for unity and common witness so that the next 500 years may be shaped by the visible unity of the church acting, praying and witnessing together for the transformation of the world.
51. The long process since 1999 as WARC and since 2010 as the WCRC has also taught us much about respecting difference and the meaning of communion within our family. The process of consultation demonstrated sufficient enthusiasm, agreement and encouragement for the Executive Committee to agree to associate with the JDDJ, but at the same time at least two members clearly expressed their dissent, and others expressed some unease. In the spirit of communion those churches did not want to block the decision, but did need to be assured that their dissent was heard, understood and made visible. This we will find a suitable way to do. The experience has sharpened for us the complexities of life in a global Communion where what is right and even imperative at a global level can cause tensions and unease in specific contexts. The JDDJ revealed both this tension and the grace given and displayed by not allowing differences to divide us, but at the same time showing the need for differences to be acknowledged and respected.
52. The other wing on the bird of our ecumenical vocation at this Council is the signing with the LWF of the “Wittenberg Witness”—fruit of the Reformed–Lutheran Dialogue. In this report and in *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig*, this expression of deepening the unity of the two Reformation churches by taking more concrete steps towards unity is another offering in the year 2017. As President Pillay says in his report, this is an act “to turn the tide around” and communicate Wittenberg as the symbol of the renewal and transformation we all seek.
53. The president’s address has helpfully lifted up the Protestant distinctiveness that we need to embrace and enrich with our own diverse yet particular theological perspective as a WCRC family bringing the living and transforming Reformed tradition to the present tense. Here I want to reflect on the shift from the preoccupation with “confessionalism” to embracing our vocation as a “confessing” communion. Bringing the resources of the Reformed theological and confessing tradition in to the present tense means listening to the suffering and cries of humanity and all of creation. It means listening and responding to the situations of our churches who live and witness in situations of injustice and oppression. It means all together listening and responding to the suffering, violence and oppression at the global level of the life of *oikumene* and creation itself. The whole of creation is the theatre of God’s grace. This tenet of Calvin must lead us to follow both the imperatives and the approach of confessing moments as represented by Barmen, Belhar and Accra. We confess that the “Earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.” We are bold to say “Jesus is Lord.” Now we must act as if we mean it.
54. The WCRC is in the position to intensify the prophetic traditions of public witness as a confessing communion in a world fallen among thieves. More confessional churches are adding Belhar to their books of confession. And many churches in our family see in Belhar new clarity to guide their prophetic witness in response to the deepening racism, authoritarianism and exclusion in global and national contexts.

55. The Barmen Declaration, born like Belhar in a specific historic context, is now gaining renewed currency as a gospel-centred way of being church in contexts where the liberating Lordship of Jesus Christ and the God of Life are pushed aside by idols of nationalism, war, security, profit, class, race, caste, patriarchy and the many more that crowd the pantheon of sin and death.
56. We continue to hear of the continuing and even growing relevance of the Accra Confession. Some seminaries and church and mission programmes have based their curriculums and strategic plans and mission vision on the reading of the signs of the times and faith stance for the economy and the Earth. The ecumenical New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) programme and the São Paulo Statement are rooted in the Accra understanding of justice and resistance to Empire. Recent Vatican documents echo the affirmations, analysis and imperatives of Accra (e.g. *Laudato Si*).
57. At the same time many within our own family of churches do not know Accra. Our vocation as a family of churches “called to communion, committed to justice” requires us to take firm steps to make our Reformed witness known to our own family on the global level; to put mission at the centre of our Communion’s life, living out fully our identity as a confessing, ecumenical communion in the spirit of Barmen, Belhar and Accra—while following their example with a renewed and consistent reading of the signs of times.
58. To bring the Reformation into the “present tense” is to renew and transform the church for the renewal and transformation of the world. This requires us to engage the “tense present” or said another way, take on the “tensions of the present age.” We must as a Communion intentionally put ourselves in the eye of the storm, to go to the belly of the beast, to go to where God’s creation is most under threat, to be with those whose life, freedom and wellbeing is most at risk to the powers of injustice, sin and death (Matthew 25). The context of Reformation calls us to embrace and translate the key pillars of the multiple identities of the Reformed traditions into the present tense—specifically, the confessional, theological tradition of transformative, prophetic, public witness in the spirit of Barmen, Belhar and Accra, and always rooted and guided by Scripture and rigorous theological reflection.
59. The second frame or context for our reflection on the WCRC is that of our identity, mission and vocation since 2010 as a family of churches “called to communion, committed to justice;” in short, our life as a communion of churches.
60. As a communion, *KOINONIA* or fellowship in intimate relationship bonded by love and interdependence, we are obviously very much a work in progress. The strategic plan of 2011 laid out lofty goals for our life together as a Communion. The Consultation on Communion in 2014 shows that we have still a long way to go. We are a family of nearly 80 million believers, many of whom have no idea that we exist or that they are part of us. Not all member churches thought that calling ourselves the World COMMUNION of Reformed Churches actually meant that we had a new way of relating to each other different than we had when we were a “Council” or an “Alliance.” Those members who do place value on “communion” relationship don’t all share the same understanding of what communion means or what it might be expected of us. There is a broad appreciation and value placed in belonging to a family of churches with shared history, tradition and understanding of the faith, but we have a very long way to go.
61. For some of our members and especially smaller churches in the Global South, the WCRC is their only significant organizational relationship or wider fellowship. In times of crisis, conflict and need belonging to the WCRC has been extremely significant and uplifting. On the other hand, many churches (especially but not only United and Uniting churches) struggle with valuing the WCRC connection while at the same time belonging to other (and sometimes many) families, communions and ecumenical organizations nationally, regionally and globally.
62. This diversity in the midst of rapidly changing situations of our churches creates many opportunities but also many challenges for the WCRC.
63. The challenge of sustainability, including ensuring sufficient financial resources to maintain and nurture our Communion has been a major issue for the last seven years and continues to be a major challenge despite considerable progress. All member churches must assume this task and responsibility if the WCRC is to fulfil its mission and survive and thrive. We must have all regions and our members vigorously supporting the WCRC.
64. In light of common pressures on the whole ecumenical movement concerning the sustainability of the current architecture of the world ecumenical movement, I believe it is important for the WCRC to enter into multicultural conversations with other ecumenical bodies seeking common or mutually supportive models of ecumenical

sustainability. We must seek new strategies together. We should consider joint assemblies and other specific ideas and do so urgently.

65. Since 2010, the WCRC has stressed the importance for our unity and mission of communion through the full involvement of member churches and regions in the work of the WCRC in terms of vision, programme, witness and decision-making. The life and witness of the WCRC must reach the national and regional levels but also the congregational level. All of these levels and realities must shape the priorities, programmes and witness of the WCRC as a world communion. This is both a theological and practical imperative.
66. Regional empowerment and participation was a key dimension of the 2011 strategic plan. The 2014 Consultation on Communion stressed the importance of regions in the life of the Communion. A Regional Empowerment Consultation in 2017 reaffirmed the centrality of the role of regions in the synergy of the WCRC and confessed and lamented that we were far from where we need to be and that many issues regarding regional empowerment including consultation, communication, representation, the number of regular councils, etc. have yet to be adequately addressed. Attending to these issues effectively and as a new approach to membership contributions have shown some positive results. Overall, the members report shrinking resources and in the Global North dwindling numbers and increased competition for scarce resources.
67. Traditional approaches to fundraising in the last seven years show new context-sensitive approaches are needed. Sustainability issues were eased but not totally resolved by the move to Hannover. Partnerships with CWM, EMW, *Otto per Mille*, and *Brot für die Welt* have been extremely helpful and revitalized our programmes and witness, but more stable and membership driven solutions must be found, especially for our core budget. It must be stressed that the mobilization of funds for this General Council represents a unique historical moment because of the Reformation 2017 commemorations. The significant German church and government funding tied to the Reformation year will not be available again. No one should leave this meeting with the impression that the WCRC is a wealthy organization. If we do not find new ways to sustain and expand our work and witness we not meet our calling as a communion. These issues are equally issues of communion and of justice.
68. Our communion has—as have all other Christian world communions—had its unity and common purpose challenged and threatened by significant differences between and among members concerning human sexuality. The differences include but are by no means limited to differences concerning same sex marriage, the ordination of LGBTQ¹ clergy, biblical understandings of homosexuality and theological and biblical understanding of the church as an inclusive community.
69. It is important to note that the WCRC has not taken a position on the issues of human sexuality.
70. There are currently member churches who have severed mission and communion relationships and partnerships with other churches who are also WCRC members because of the differences cited above. Our commitment to unity and communion—to *koinonia*—is weakened if we imagine that it is possible to be fully in communion at the global level but not in communion with other specific churches within the Communion.
71. Our common commitment to Christ’s call to communion leads us to not accept that issues of human sexuality and differences in faithful and biblical interpretation are church-dividing and communion-dividing issues. Our living Reformed tradition, along with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, offers significant biblical and theological resources for members of the Communion to dialogue and discern together how to maintain our unity, do justice and respect difference.
72. As mentioned above the Executive Committee in 2016 as part of the final phase of the revised strategic plan has proposed a consultative process and resources to create the possibility for dialogue and engagement in processes to explore together the meaning of communion and to strive to maintain our unity while facing our difference and healing the imperatives of justice.
73. The first consultation on the global level will be for a group of 25 member churches hosted by the Church of South India. The purpose is not to come to a common position on human sexuality but to strengthen our understanding of communion and the Reformed approach to respectful dialogue—taking away the power of our differences to divide us while honouring the imperative of justice.

¹LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
EN/2017:06:30/Listening 2/Report of the General Secretary

74. It is clear that God has given us many gifts and resources to help us nurture the gift of unity, and the Reformed tradition particularly values vigorous theological and biblical reflection in community as an instrument for mission and unity. It is time to create the spaces and resources to dialogue and maintain respectful relationships and not allow the differences we have as we face the wider and complex issues of human sexuality and especially issues of faithful interpretations of the Scriptures to threaten God's gift of unity.
75. A challenge for the Christian church and therefore for our Communion is the full participation of women in the ordained ministries, governance and decision-making structures of the churches.
76. This Council has come close to the goal of a gender balanced meeting, and it must be noted that member churches responded very positively to the encouragement to fulfil the constitutionally stipulated balances. One obstacle to achieve a full balance is that the way the current constitution sets the entitlement for churches to appoint delegations based on the number of baptized members. Article IX of the constitution allows for three delegates for churches up to 200,000 members, five delegates for churches with 300,001 to 500,000, seven delegates for churches with 750,001 to 1,000,000 and nine delegates for members with 1,500,001 to 2,000,000. This formula creates four situations where delegations could be odd numbered, making it numerically challenging to fulfil the constitutional requirement that delegations be gender balanced.
77. The proposed constitutional amendments to be decided upon by this Council would change the formula in order to ensure that all delegations over one delegate will be even numbered, allowing for the constitutional provision to be implemented. This is very important if we are to ensure the full and equal participation of men and women and ordained ministers and lay people.
78. The constitution also stipulates youth delegates in delegations of over four delegates. The formula ensures only a very modest participation of youth. This points to a much deeper issue for our Communion. Many, if not most, of our members face challenges in promoting the full and equal participation of people under the age of 30 in the life and ministry of our churches.
79. The 2011 strategic plan placed an emphasis on youth leadership development and promoting the formation of young theologians through programmes such as the Global Institute of Theology (GIT). While we are encouraged by the excellent contribution of stewards, GIT participation and the input of the Youth Pre-Council, the participation of youth in the life of the Communion falls far, far short of what is required for us to be an inclusive and vibrant Communion. This is an issue that must receive priority attention in the next seven years.
80. Another communion challenge that WCRC has failed to adequately address is our commitment for the solidarity with and participation of indigenous peoples. The underlying commitments made at the Uniting General Council need to be more fully attended to.
81. Similarly there is a long-standing call for the WCRC family to intentionally address the call by the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) and differently abled people in our churches for their full inclusion in our programmes and structures.
82. Another challenge for our Communion is the reality of global migration. Globally there is a humanitarian and socio-political crisis of forced displacement and refugees of historically unprecedented dimensions; over 70 million people. This massive forced displacement is a symptom and consequence of militarized, systemic, and structural economic, social, ecological and political inequality, injustice and oppression, which are the bitter fruits of Empire.
83. The imperatives of justice, peace, solidarity and compassion call for a wide response by our Communion to see this reality in its complexity and respond at both the level of compassion and diakonia and also at the level of global justice, transforming the economic and political systems that provoke forced displacement.
84. At the same time I raise the issue as a communion issue because migration is changing the nature of our cultures and societies and also is changing our self-understanding of church, evangelism and mission within societies, including the Global North where the relationship with other churches in the global family is now taking on a new dimension and the processes of secularization are being impacted by migration.
85. In reading the signs of the times and understanding the full impact that immigration—and particularly forced migration—represents as crisis, challenge and blessing and opportunity, the WCRC needs to create spaces and resources for our churches in all parts of the Communion to dialogue, pray and act together in both prophetic and

humanitarian actions. Migration itself is a human reality and not a problem but a blessing. Forced displacement is an injustice and a sin. Our congregations, nations and regions are living in a profoundly cross-cultural and trans-cultural reality that we must understand and address.

86. There is also an important challenge for the WCRC in terms of the imperatives for inter-faith dialogue and inter-religious solidarity and cooperation for justice, peace and reconciliation. Here justice is, of course, in the spirit of the Accra Confession, a biblically-based understanding inclusive of economic, ecological, gender and social justice.
87. Many of our churches live in contexts where they are the religious minorities numerically and sometimes culturally. The WCRC has begun to develop processes and consultations along with other ecumenical and Christian forums to address the mission and evangelism challenges in such contexts. This includes joining the theological discernment around situations of religious persecution and discrimination. We need to urgently increase our common theological reflection from the Reformed tradition, deepening and broadening our accompaniment of member churches in facing the complexities and life-and-death dangers in situations of spiralling religious polarization.
88. At the same time we must add our voice to the global reading of the signs of the times and seek to discern the political, social, cultural, economic and military interests in play. We must be more intentional as a Communion in vigorous theological and biblical reflection from the Reformed tradition rooted contextually in the situations of our member churches while challenging polarizing calls for “civilizational wars of religions” pitting Christianity against other faiths by living out God’s vision for all to live in peace and be unafraid (Micah 4:4).
89. Jesus calls us “to know the things that make for peace.” Inter-religious cooperation aided by inter-faith dialogue, nurtured by vigorous theological reflection and biblical discernment on a Communion-wide basis, regionally and locally, should be a priority for WCRC in the next seven years. This of course includes that the WCRC, from our communion and justice perspective, requires broad consultations on the relationship between religion and violence at all levels of the life of the Communion and provides spaces and resources for discernment, engagement and witness.
90. The third frame of the entangled and enmeshed context in which we embody our theme—“Living God, renew and transform us”—is the context of a rapidly changing global context beset with multiple and interdependent life threatening crises. To put it metaphorically, we are called out to confess the God of Life in a world fallen among thieves. In John 10, Jesus contrasts himself as the good Shepherd who comes so that “all may have life” with the thieves and robbers that come only to steal, kill and destroy.
91. In 2004, the Accra Confession said we lived in a scandalous world. In 2010, the Uniting General Council echoed and affirmed Accra’s witness. Now in 2017, the world situation has only gotten worse and is rapidly deteriorating. Inequality is in such an ethically intolerable place that Oxfam reports “just eight men own the same wealth as one half of the entire world.” We have cried out against ecological destruction and extreme poverty, wars, violence, erosion of human solidarity, spiralling religiously justified violence, slavery, human trafficking, systemic racism, casteism, gender based sexual violence and skyrocketing cultures of fear, hate, xenophobia and exclusion.
92. We are in a world fallen among thieves; a world created and loved by God but in social, political, cultural, economic and religious terms dominated by systems and structures and even spiritualities that obey other masters. Who can doubt that Mammon reigns in much of the world order, that the idols of market, nationalism, individualism, death, war and violence hold sway (Jeremiah 10:10)?
93. The Accra Confession named and renounced both economic ideologies and systems that stand in the way of the fullness of life through Jesus Christ. Accra also named the convergence of systems, structures, cultures and spiritualities of domination as Empire from the biblical, prophetic understanding of Empire/Babylon. And Accra called us to stand with Jesus’ resistance to Roman domination in the prophetic and jubilee traditions.
94. The theological horizon of Accra is profoundly biblical, drawing on the jubilee–prophetic trajectory which runs through the whole of the biblical witness. The biblical concept of God and faith in God being inseparable from justice was firmly embraced by Calvin and theologians of the Reformed tradition and is strong in First Reformation traditions. The integrity of God’s saving action being an indivisible reality of justification and justice is central to our theological tradition and finds robust expression in the Accra Confession. (The theological link is developed in the Reformed statement attached to our association with the JDDJ, as well.)

95. The conceptual framework of the Accra Confession (drawing as it does from Barmen and Belhar) advanced a lens for reading the signs of the times and faithful Christian witness that since 2004 have gained wide ecumenical and social agreement. This includes the linking of economic and ecological justice (“The Cry of the Poor – The Cry of the Earth,” Luke 4:16-21)—and the linking and entwining of both the above with gender justice. As mentioned above the Vatican, the WCC and other world communions have advanced positions and reflections in very strong resonance with the Accra Confession, such as *Laudato Si* and *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*.
96. The much discussed Empire analysis generated both controversy and constructive ecumenical debate and now forms the basis of some ecumenical and mission organizations’ core statements of mission and vision such as the World Student Christian Federation and the Council for World Mission. Some institutions of theological education have in fact revised and restructured their curriculum based on the “mission in the times of empire” contribution of Accra and the WARC-led “Manila Declaration” notable is the case of the United Theological Seminary in the Philippines.
97. The biblical–theological–missiological lens of Empire based on a reading of the signs of the times has in the period since Accra inspired a massive amount of theological writing and a now well-established approach to New Testament studies. The biblical-theological action reflection project called “Radicalizing the Reformation – Provoked by the Bible and Today’s Crises,” draws heavily on the insights of Accra, Grand Rapids, and the WCRC vision.
98. We have, at the same time, come a long way since Accra, both in our debates and in the profound way the world and our churches are changing. There are key realities that have not changed and continue to be part of our reading the signs of the times. The realities of economic injustice and growing inequality have gotten worse. The scale of human caused climate change and its destructive effects are clearer now than then—even as there are some steps forward, in response there have been backwards steps as well. The plague of gender based sexual violence is spiralling. The oppression of women, girls and children in all its dimensions screams at us as a persistent structural sin including in our churches. New realities demand to be named and understood, as already mentioned above.
99. Here I want to stress that the contribution of Accra in the use of “Empire” is not and was not about advancing an ideological position, but taking serious the reality described when Accra says “we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination...” Since its creation, debate and study of the Accra Confession has allowed us to enrich that definition further. Empire/Babylon names realities of sin and death which have a global and systemic nature. Empire/Babylon is not mostly a place, but a complexly entangled reality with local, national, regional and global divisions. Today more than one power nation is competing for dominance and hegemony.
100. The enormity of this massive threat to life demands that we not only debate how to name this reality, but that, led by the Spirit of life, we resist it and seek to transform it. This requires our own transformation as persons and as churches. Again, recall the Accra Confession, article 28: “We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness” (John 10:10). Jesus brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Luke 4:18); he supports and protects the downtrodden, the stranger, the orphans and the widows.” All this means living out God’s mission in the power of the Holy Spirit in our time and place, freeing real captives, healing real bodies broken by oppression and reviving creation itself.
101. In addressing our global context, we understand that as a people of faith, we must include and collaborate others, and not only other faith groups, but also NGOs, social movements, civil society organized or undefined, many of which of which are calling us to join them in the search for global transformation and to defend the life of the people and the planet.
102. The call “to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed” comes not only from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (12:2) as a Gospel imperative, but from those whose bodies, lives, lands and hopes have been broken, destroyed and held captive along with creation itself by the current, complex world (dis)order.
103. Many biblical scholars would agree that when the Apostle Paul in Romans 12 speaks of the “world,” he is speaking specifically about the world order of Roman rule. This resonates with the social movements and civil society voices, indigenous peoples, faith groups, women and victims of oppression, who cry out against our current world order, which is rigged against the poor and vulnerable, and cry out that another world is possible. In reading the signs of the times, witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and confessing the God of Life, in this world so desperately in

need of transformation, we must be open to making common cause with transforming the world and caring for the Earth.

104. Canadian author and activist Naomi Klein, in her new book *No Is Not Enough*, put forward a clear analysis that seeks to explain why, faced with so many threats to life, justice and dignity, people do not seem to act in their own interests and in fact allow policies, laws and practices that violate their own declared values.
105. Klein argues that tactics, policies, interests and politics that are so destructive to life can be resisted. This is a statement most people of faith would agree with. She begins with the idea that we allow these destructive systems because others use times of shock and crisis to impose unjust and oppressive policies that people are too disoriented by the shock or crisis to resist. She says, “we need a firm grasp of how shock politics work and whose interests they serve...this is how we get out of shock and start fighting back.”
106. “Secondly, we have to tell a different story from the one the shock doctors are pedalling, a vision of the world compelling enough to go head to head with theirs.” She goes on: “This values-based vision must offer a different path, away from serial shocks—based on coming together across racial, ethnic, religious, and gender divides, rather than being wrenched further apart, and one based on healing the planet rather than unleashing further destabilizing wars and pollution. Most of all, that vision needs to offer those who are hurting—for lack of jobs, lack of health care, lack of peace, lack of hope—a tangibly better life.”
107. No one would think that Klein is reading directly from the prophets and Gospels, but her sources are the life experience and leadership examples of people brutalized by the system and in fact point exactly to where the Bible points.
108. She points to groups in the US collaborating together and says, “it is possible to see the outlines of a progressive majority, one grounded in a bold plan for the safe and caring world we all want and need.” At this point, unknowingly, Klein is echoing the concept of leadership in mission coming from the margins, from the poor and oppressed as expressed in the WCC mission statement *Together Towards Life*.
109. Using a sports metaphor, but one that would not be lost on the prophets or on Jesus of Galilee, Klein asserts, “we need to fight offence and defence simultaneously—to resist the attacks of the present day and still find space to build the future we need.”
110. So close to the theological method of affirming and rejecting, confessing and denouncing, Klein reverses the order and says, “In other words, the firmness of No’s has to be accompanied by a bold forward looking yes.” She adds, “‘Yes,’ is the beacon in the coming storms that will prevent us from losing our way.” Klein is calling all to overcome division for the sake of transformation.
111. And for us? Yes, to the God of Life so all can have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10) and Yes, we do know what the Lord requires of us (Micah 6:8).
112. So as a vital, diverse Communion with common roots and common vision but significant differences, we gather here in Leipzig to assess the past seven years, take stock of the “present times” and, preceded by the God of Life, we stare the future (both threatening and hopeful) in the face.
113. As argued in this report we can understand our call and challenges as responding to the three shaping contexts:
 - a. The history of our Reformation and ecumenical context covering at least 500 years
 - b. Our context as a church family newly focused on our life as a communion, a *koinonia*; “Committed to Communion – Called to Justice”
 - c. The context of our world—history and creation. Groaning in travail, fallen among thieves, but gripped with the power of the resurrection, gifted by the God of Life.
114. At the collision of these three urgent contexts, we give thanks to God for all that we received as a family of churches and now bend into our confession and prayer. For all our brokenness and incompleteness, we have the gift of communion. We confess our faith in the God of Life and seek renewal and transformation.
115. How will WCRC on all its levels answer Klein’s and the wider world’s yearning for a Yes that will get us all (creation included) through “the storms?” What is our Yes in a world fallen among thieves where No is not enough? Is there a distinctive missional contribution from the Reformed family of churches?

116. Our “no” to structures of sin and death is resoundingly clear! Barmen, Belhar, Accra and the faithful and prophetic witness against injustice call out undeniably. And yet for many, even with all the strong affirmations we make, our Yes is not clear—or not yet clear enough.
117. Emerging from our confession of the Living God through the power of the Holy Spirit we are called to embrace a bold Yes to life, to live out and give voice to a compelling, values-based vision that creates a real plan that lifts up those crushed by Empire. Here, we will not be able to rest on religious slogans, pious hopes or righteous proclamations. Klein—and the suffering human and earth community—demand “the offering of a different path” against “the great unmaking;” a path based on coming together as peoples and healing the planet to offer those who are hurting a “tangible better life.”
118. We seek humbly the renewal and transformation needed to respond through the grace of God, the leading of the spirit and in discipleship to Jesus Christ as a Communion.
119. Challenged to “make plain the vision” (Habakkuk 2:2) we know in the Scriptures that the prophetic Micah is clear and plain spoken on the big picture: “Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.” Psalm 85 is clear that we should turn to God and when we do “God speaks peace...peace and justice embrace.” Isaiah 58 is clear that if we stand with the hungry, poor and afflicted we will be called “repairers of the breach and restorers of streets to live in.” That does sound more tangible!
120. Jesus is clear that his Yes is God’s mission in the power of the Spirit lifted up in Luke 4: Bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, liberation to the oppressed, to proclaim the year of jubilee so the people and earth may live. Jesus is even plainer in Matthew 25 that our Yes must be a path that is centred on the least favoured: the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the refugee, the prisoner, the stranger.
121. But at this historical turning point what does this path to renewal and transformation really look like? For our Communion what are the markers of a bold way forward where the Yes is as clear as the No? How do we in our next seven years humbly but boldly and fully take on a Yes that, in the power of God’s Spirit, will lead to the healing of the Earth and tangibly better life for those who are brutalized by injustice.
122. For her part Klein is honest and humble in saying she doesn’t exactly know what the Yes looks like. She implies none of us know yet. We are all trying to figure it out, but perceptively she suggests how we will figure it out, and with who and where. In effect she says: “I don’t have a plan, but I do know it will emerge collaboratively. I know who the architects and artisans of the plan are and where the path will be discerned.” Without any direct reference or allusion Klein is in strong resonance with the jubilee-prophetic-Jesus tradition of the Bible. In fact she is moving entirely in the same direction as the WCC recent mission statement, *Together Towards Life (TTL)*. *TTL* is clear how God works and who God is using to construct what Klein has called the “bold plan for the safe and caring world we all want and need.” The who in *TTL* and in the Bible is clear. In repairing the breach in a broken world God uses the poor, oppressed, marginalized, excluded, including the excluded Earth itself. God uses those people whose lives are destroyed, broken and threatened. The Lord of the resurrection transforms the world through the crucified Lord and lifts up the crucified people and the crucified Earth. This is the Gospel paradox that Klein, the secular activist, mirrors back to us. Not only does the church evangelize the world, the least favoured evangelize the church. With God’s leading we make the Yes path together, towards life.
123. The “how” of the Yes is to work together with all those effected—collaboratively, mutually and in loving solidarity. The question of who are architects and artisans of the Yes has a biblical answer: the architects and artisans that God is using to renew and transform are the very ones lifted up in Luke 4 and Matthew 25.
124. Our bold Yes must directly be constructed working with those God uses as co-transformers of the current economic system. Together on the local, national and global levels the alternatives must be created by those who are brutalized by the current realities. New social relations and politics must come from below. New ways of stopping environmental destruction must come from the communities whose ancient wisdom and present realities can lead the way. The WCRC is called to add our distinctive witness as a family committed to communion and called to justice—but not alone. The new path toward *Buen Vivir*, the embracing of *Ubuntu*, the opening to God’s ushering in God’s reign must be done standing with the poor, powerless, marginalized, excluded and hopeless. We must be a Communion that seeks to be part of a *koinonia* of all—from below. So like Klein we know we still have to figure out, to discern, the specifics of our Yes. But we must do it collaboratively, and how we do it must be faithful to how Jesus lived God’s ministry with the crucified people and the Earth in the power of the resurrection in our history.

125. The where of our Yes follows from the who. Our Yes must include being where life is most at risk and most threatened, both within our own family and in the world at large. Those are places and spaces in all continents and counties. There is no east–west, north–south divide in the threat to life. Our *koinonia* means when there is pain and threat in the family the members must know they are not alone. When there is massive threat in the ecumenical family—the same. Within the wider religious community—the same. Within the whole Earth community—the same!
126. In order to fulfil our call to be a faithful, reforming and confessing *koinonia*, witnessing to the Living God in the present tense and taking our three contextual frames seriously, I would lift up the following directions for the next seven years for our engagement and discernment together:
127. This would require the WCRC to bring our diverse but distinctive Reformation(s)–Reformed traditions into the present tense by engaging the current world contexts and local contexts as a confessing ecumenical family, addressing the interlocking crises that affect the global community and creation itself. This would include strategies and resources drawing on our Protestant–Reformed identities and families from all corners of the communion.
128. This transformation and renewal would require us to ensure that the full diversity of our Reformed, United and Uniting church traditions from the north and south, east and west, young and old, men and women are heard and contributing to our theological witness.
129. This would require building up our relationships in the bonds of unity so that global, regional and local dimensions of our *koinonia* are interdependent as they influence and support each other in God’s mission and express the right relations we proclaim.
130. This renewal and transformation would require the WCRC engaging actively in the wider ecumenical family in new and creative ways, offering our distinctive voice and witness and learning from other Christians so as to strengthen unity and justice. An example would be to intensify the WCRC participation in the WCC PJP at all levels and in new ways as a major emphasis over the next four years.
131. This renewal and transformation would absolutely require specific emphasis on full and active participation of children and young people at all levels of our Communion. This also would require strategies, programmes and resources to ensure that we embrace fully the ministry of all believers.
132. This would require renewal and transformation to overcome the theological, cultural, practical, political and ideological obstacles to the full and equal participation of women and men in vigorous embracing of the ministry of all believers. This would require addressing decision-making structures where we as churches “conformed to the world” and replicated unequal power structures in the life of the church, giving precedents in status and decisions to men over women, age over youth, clergy over lay, and so on. This would include continuing to address how the ordination of women would be “binding” for the Communion.
133. This renewal and transformation would require urgently and intentionally foregrounding the participation, voices, struggles and rights of indigenous peoples, Dalits, the poor and the marginalized, excluded and oppressed, in our churches, regions and Communion. Our *koinonia* would be transformed to embrace “mission from the margins” and become a “borderless and confessing” Communion.
134. This would require acknowledging our failure to adequately affirm the ministry, voice and place of the differently abled in our midst both as an issue of their rights but also as an imperative for communion and adopting strategies and plans for full participation.
135. This renewal and transformation would require the WCRC to address the hardest challenges of inter-faith relations and embrace interreligious cooperation for peace, justice and reconciliation, drawing on the already inspiring examples within our family and responding as a family in those situations that are far from resolved. This would include resources and strategies for biblical and theological reflection and concerted action at all levels of our Communion. This would include accompanying churches, as well as the Communion reflecting on the missiological imperatives through initiatives like Mission in the Frontline. This requires actively defending the rights of all and allowing no religion to be singled out for derision or attack.
136. This would require the WCRC intentionally working with all who are seeking the renewal and transformation to address the massive threats to life and build life-affirming communities of hope and a world order based on justice

and peace according to God's call to all peoples and all creation. This includes dialogue and participation with social movements, civil society, women's movements, Dalit movements, environmental movements and all activists who embrace non-violent change for peace. The WCRC would thus provide on all levels of our Communion resources for such alliances for life. Acknowledging theologically and missiologically that God's Spirit moves throughout creation bringing life, that the church can and should also be led in its prophetic actions by those whose life is most threatened.

137. Our renewal and transformation would require continuing rigorous theological study and reading the signs of the times in a confessing spirit, drawing on the Belhar and Accra confessions, deepening our theological understanding of the intersections between justice, peace, reconciliation and gender justice.
138. This would include embracing the *kairos* and confessing identity of the WCRC, providing resources, programmes and strategies so that the contributions of our tradition(s) are known to all and can support and inspire the WCRC to address the challenges of today, bringing Reformation into the present tense, resist growing militarism, authoritarianism and radicalized injustice, among other threats, along with our ongoing commitments to gender, economic and ecological justice.
139. This renewal and transformation would include deepening our common thinking and acting about the realities of human migration and especially the root causes of forced migration as an urgent priority.
140. This renewal and transformation would require priority attention to strengthening and insuring the mutual relationships between the regions and the global WCRC and with regions and member churches. This would include consultations, strategies, resources and new ways of working in programmes, communication and decision-making.
141. This would require immediate attention to insuring the sustainability of the WCRC and all aspects of life and work as mentioned above, not the least of which is financial sustainability based on each member church contributing actively through a variety of means to supporting the common life and work of our Communion. The Executive Committee must play a key role along with the general secretary, but new strategies and creative working styles must be found that are context sensitive but ensure that all actively play a role. Joint assemblies with other Christian world communions and the WCC would be explored.
142. This would require the WCRC to continue, if to not expand, its role in accompanying member churches in situations of crisis and emergency, giving special attention to local contexts where the crisis has global consequences, to situations where there is a distinctive role for the WCRC to play because of our Reformed heritage or because our member church(es) are playing a key role, and in situations where if not for our involvement our churches would have no significant international support or solidarity in the face of life-threatening situations. This would include growing our capacities to work with others in the ecumenical movement as global witnesses to peace, justice and reconciliation and strengthening our relationship so that the whole Communion can be mobilized, called by God as co-agents of transformation where our voice or identity can make a difference. Some current examples of areas in which the WCRC could engage are the Korean peninsula, Colombia, the Middle East (Syria, Israel–Palestine), South Sudan and Nigeria.
143. Our renewal and transformation would require consolidating and deepening our common identity as a Communion, embracing God's gift of unity. This Spirit-centred unity in the name of Jesus both allows us and requires us to draw on the distinctive resources of our Protestant–Reformed tradition to acknowledge and address our differences so that we both witness to the truth of the Gospel and not allow our differences to divide us. This would include the WCRC accompanying churches facing the threat of division by providing steady resources, mediation and prayer. Most significantly it will require focusing on structures, programmes, and biblical/theological resources to consolidate our common understanding and identity as a communion (*koinonia*)—and the implications for our life together. This would include providing strategies, programmes, consultations and spaces to safely, respectfully, and constructively address our differences on issues or different approaches to interpreting Scripture, drawing on the distinctive resources and traditions of the Reformed faith rooted in Scripture open to the guiding of the Spirit.
144. This would require the WCRC humbly learning from the past 500 years so that we enter the next 500 renewed and transformed by God's grace having repented of our sins of division and exclusion and bringing the gifts of the Reformation(s) forward into the present tense as a family "called to communion, committed to justice."
145. The WCRC at this Council faces a historic *kairos*, gathered in our diversity with our distinctive voices, proclaiming a new moment of ecumenical reconciliation, without ignoring significant problems and significant differences within

and among the Christian churches, building up our *koinonia*, studying the Bible, praying, witnessing and confessing to the Living God in a world desperate for the fullness of life.

146. In joy, in hope, humbly repentant, with great expectations, sobered by the stark realities we have to face, my report ends affirming that the WCRC has moved forward as a communion and is positioned, in spite of many challenges, to embrace the call of the Living God. So, emboldened by grace, chastened by our shortcomings and with thanks to God, we pray "Living God, renew and transform us."

147. To God be the glory. Amen.

Addendum: WCRC Staff Overview: 2010-2017

The following is a list of the former WCRC staff:

- Penelope Blachut (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until July 2012
- Yueh Cho (Switzerland), Finance Coordinator, served until December 2013
- Jet den Hollander (The Netherlands), Executive Secretary for Mission Projects, served until February 2011
- Smaranda Dochia (Romania), Administrative Assistant, served until December 2010
- Claudia Duval (Germany), Administrative Assistant to the General Secretariat, served from January 2014 until January 2016
- Brigitte Facchin (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until May 2010
- Ayari Felix (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until January 2010
- Heather Fouquet (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until September 2010
- Ruthan Gill (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant of Communications, September 2010
- Kristine Greenaway (Canada), Executive Secretary for Communications, served until March 2013
- Victoria Koczian (Hungary), Administrative Assistant to TMC, served from January 2014 until May 2015
- Joy Lee (US), REC Assistant, served until July 2010
- Hartmut Lucke (Switzerland), Translator/ Interpreter, served until 2013 (volunteer)
- Daphne Martin-Gnanadason (India), Administrative Assistant, served until 2013
- Ida Milli (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant, served until December 2013
- Emelda Ndipewah (Cameroon), Administrative Assistant to TMC and Justice and Partnership, served October 2015 through December 2016
- Setri Nyomi (Ghana), General Secretary, served until 2014
- Maureen O'Brien (Great Britain), Executive Secretary for Finance and Fundraising, served until November 2010
- Paraic Reamon (Ireland), Deputy Director of the Partnership Fund, served 2012-2015
- Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth (Guyana), Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, served until June 2011
- Franziska Surber (Switzerland), Administrative Assistant of Communications, served until November 2010
- Richard van Houten (US), REC GS, served until September 2010
- Antoinette Visser (The Netherlands), Partnership Fund Assistant, served until 2011 (volunteer)

The following is a list of the current WCRC staff:

- Christopher Ferguson (Canada), General Secretary, since April 2014
- Aruna Gnanadason (India), Consultant to TMC, serves from April 2016 until August 2017
- Werner Joecker, since April 2014
- Mun-Kee Kim (South Korea, Seconded), Project Coordinator for Peace and Development, since October 2016
- Anna Krüger (Germany), Administrative Assistant for Finance and Communications, since November 2013
- Hanns Lessing, General Council Coordinator, since July 2015
- Katrina Mertz (US), Administrative Assistant to the General Secretariat, since January 2016
- Paul Oppenheim (Germany), Project Assistant / Translator, since 2014 (partially volunteer)
- Amritha Perumalla-Bosi, Administrative Assistant to TMC and Justice and Partnership, since June 2015
- Gerhard Plenter (Germany), Finance Coordinator, since 2014 (volunteer)
- Sylke Saggio (Germany), Cleaning Staff, since August 2016
- Philip Tanis, Executive Secretary for Communications, since February 2014
- Dora Arce-Valentin (Cuba), Executive Secretary for Justice and Partnership, served until December 2017
- Douwe Visser (The Netherlands), Executive Secretary for Theology, Mission and Communion, serves until August 2017