

## Address of the President

Rev. Prof. Jerry Pillay

### Introduction

1. Psalm 8 speaks about the majesty of God and acknowledges that God is creator of the heavens and the earth: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens." It testifies to the fact that God is in control even though at times it may not seem that way.
2. The world today is in crisis! There is abundance of pain, suffering, turmoil and conflict. We are surrounded by violence, fear, terrorism, political unrest, natural disasters, unemployment, poverty, gender discrimination, famine, dreaded diseases, religious tensions, religious fundamentalism, wars, factions, forced migration, political dictatorship, abuse of women and children, and the list goes on.
3. In the midst of all these we may fail to understand what's going on. We are even tempted to question the presence of God. Psalm 8 reminds us that God is present and that God has everything in God's hands. The Apostle Paul captures this truth for us in Romans 8:22-25. He establishes: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." The Apostle then grounds this in the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Further, the Holy Spirit helps us through our struggles and "intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (v.26). The realities in the world and church calls for renewal and transformation.
4. Five hundred years ago Reformers were concerned about the state of the church. The concept of renewal is not strange to Reformed churches. In fact, at the heart of the Reformation was the intent to reform, revive and renew the church. Basic for the understanding of ecumenism is that the Reformers did not intend to found a new church but sought reform the whole church. In their minds the church was not standing up to the realities of its time in confronting financial corruption, sexual immorality and political power.
5. Reformers such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others called for the "reawakening" of the church to address these issues. In so doing they did not hesitate to point out the inadequacies and corruption of the church which impacted on its life, work, witness and theology. These, for example, are reflected in Luther's *95 Thesis* and Calvin's *The Necessity of Reforming the Church (1543)*. This renewal was to impact the structure, polity, theology, mission, worship and witness of the church. The attempt to renew and reform the church also seriously impacted the transformation of society as well.
6. And now 500 years later we sense an even greater need for renewal and transformation of both church and society. This evidently is what we have tried to capture in the theme we have chosen for this General Council: "*Living God, renew and transform us.*"
7. The theme reflects a prayer to the "living God" which speaks of God's presence and power in the world. The resurrection power tells us that there is nothing in this world that God cannot overcome. The Gospel writer Mark tells us that God in Christ overcomes danger, demons, diseases, death (chapter 5). The cross speaks of the measure that God will go through to restore and save the world. It is all because of love! This theme is reflected as a prayer to God who lives and reigns in the world. It is a prayer that God will make the church and Christians to be what God wants and wills for us to be, and that God will use us to change the world so that it may reflect God's reign and presence bringing justice, peace, love and abundance of life to all. But what does it mean to be renewed and transformed?
8. The word "renew" implies that we have lost something, and that we should go back to what we should be, to begin or take up again, to restore to a former state, to replenish, revive or re-establish, to make new. It is the first step to real transformation. In many senses the church has lost, neglected, forgotten and forsaken its calling. We are called to proclaim the good news of salvation and life in Jesus Christ but we have become side-tracked from our main purpose as church.
9. The word "transform" means to change completely from inside out. It has the same meaning as transfiguration (Matthew 17:2) or metamorphosis which means to change into another form. The picture here is of a caterpillar which changes into something quite different when it becomes a butterfly. So how do we seek renewal and transformation? I will return to this later.
10. The "us" in the theme is a reference to both the church and the world. We recognize that the church is in much need of renewal and transformation in as much as the world with all its injustices, corruption, deceit and unrighteousness. We thus need to speak to ourselves first before we can tell the world what to do or not to do. In some senses the church is a microcosm of the world rather than being a bridgehead to an alternative world filled with justice, peace and fullness of life for all (John 10:10).
11. In this address I shall mainly focus on four areas: 1) the 500th Martin Luther Reformation Anniversary, 2) the life and witness of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) from Grand Rapids (2010) to Leipzig, 3) some visionary thoughts about the future of the WCRC, and 4) express thanks to all those who have contributed to the life and work of the WCRC in the past seven years.

## The 2017 Reformation

12. 2017 is no doubt a big year for Protestant and Reformed churches as we celebrate the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther and his formulation of his Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg. No doubt, Luther's courage to challenge the church in his time paved the way for immense changes to the life, work and witness of the church. It was not Luther's intention to break away from the Roman Catholic Church but to bring about renewal and transformation in the church. This attempt inevitably led to wide-scale impact on social, political and economic structures that challenged and transformed society as well.
13. There are numerous activities and events taking place all over the world to celebrate this event. Churches, universities, seminaries, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) the Lutheran World Federation and many others have organized various events to celebrate this Reformation anniversary. The WCRC is also participating in these celebrations. One of the questions we are asked is, why is the WCRC celebrating the 2017 Luther Reformation since this ordinarily should be an event for the Lutherans?
14. In fact, this is a question that has confused some people, both Reformed Christians and others. I shall now venture to offer some insights into this question as to why the WCRC has chosen to participate in the 2017 Luther Reformation anniversary and what we hope to bring to this significant celebration.
15. Firstly, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) joined in an historic celebration in 2010 to form what is now known as the WCRC. This new body consists of 230 member churches in 109 countries in the world with a membership of nearly 80 million Christians who are part of the Reformed, Congregational, Presbyterian, Waldensian and United and Uniting Churches. In this regard, on the ground, throughout the world, there are strong ties between Lutheran and Reformed Christians. This is most evident in United and Uniting churches. Thus, such deep rooting and connections makes the Reformation celebration an observed reality for many Christians in the world and a shared experience on the ground, especially in the life of united congregations.
16. Secondly, the Reformation is not centred on one person or event but on a number of contributions by various individuals such as Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin, Knox and others. The Lutheran Reformation was initially an academic movement initiated by Martin Luther, concerned with reforming the teaching of theology at the University of Wittenberg, particularly as Luther was concerned with the doctrine of justification. However, with time, Luther's program for academic reform changed into a program for reform of church and society. His ideas influenced religious, social and political reforming movements which opened the way to new religious and social thinking in Europe.
17. The origins of the Reformed church lie with developments within the Swiss Confederation. Whereas the Lutheran Reformation had its origins primarily in an academic context in Germany, the Reformed church owed its origins more to a series of attempts to reform the morals and worship of the church according to a more biblical pattern. The term "Calvinism" (John Calvin) is often used to refer to the religious ideas of the Reformed church. It is now generally discouraged that we should use this term because Reformed theology draws from a variety of sources other than Calvin himself (McGrath 2012:8). In fact, it is generally agreed that Calvin's ideas were modified subtly by his successors, and it has evolved into something new. Both Luther's and Calvin's ideas ultimately extended beyond their local domain and reached out to places in England, Netherlands, Scotland, France and, today, it is also beyond these countries, impacting on Latin America, the Global South and other parts of the world. For example, John Witte Jr. recently noted how Calvin's teachings on authority and liberty, duties and rights, and church and state had influenced many Protestant lands. He states that as a result of its adaptability, this "rendered early modern Calvinism one of the driving engines of Western constitutionalism." According to Witte, "a number of our bedrock Western understandings of civil and political rights, social and confessional pluralism, federalism and social contract, and more owe a great deal to Calvinist theological and political reforms" (Witte:2007:2).
18. Thus the Reformation, as we understand it today, is very diverse, complex and broad, encompassing a vast volume of encounters and experiences. In this sense the Reformation includes several churches, countries and movements, and all of these experiences, including the Martin Luther Reformation, are part and parcel to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the Reformation. It is primarily for this reason that the WCRC joins in the 2017 Reformation celebrations.
19. Thirdly, in recent years a welcome degree of convergence has been worked out by the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans and the Methodists. In 1999, after many years of serious dialogue, The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) was signed by the Roman Catholics and Lutherans and ratified by the Methodists in 2006. By this, it is clearly indicated that what was once the flashpoint of the Reformation has settled into relative concord. The mutual anathemas of the 16th century, while still accepted as salutary warnings, have been laid aside as not applying to the present. This has been strongly discovered and expressed in the Reformed-Lutheran Dialogue. Several years of dialogue with the Lutherans has shown us that we have more in common theologically than we have otherwise believed.

20. In this light, the WCRC has also welcomed the invitation to join the ecumenical concord of the JDDJ. In making its own contribution to the JDDJ, the WCRC outlined its points of agreements with the Catholics and Lutherans and, most significantly, expressed its concern that the Joint Declaration remains silent about the relationship between justification and justice. This input has been welcomed by the Lutherans and Catholics. The WCRC has decided that their association with the JDDJ should take place at a special event during its General Council in June 2017. The idea is to make it a huge ecumenical event that includes not just the Lutherans, Catholics and Methodists but other denominations as well. We want to use this ecumenical service and gathering as a strong statement for Christian unity and witness.
21. John Calvin considered unity to be part of the nature of the church. His fourth book of the *Institutes* is a vivid expression of this conviction: “*On the True Church with whom we are to cultivate Unity because She is the Mother of all faithful*” (Inst.4.1). He made repeated efforts to avoid the final rupture with the Church of Rome. In particular, he worked untiringly for the unity of the various Reformation churches. In this respect, his assumption was that as long as agreement on the essentials of faith was assured, diversity among the local churches was admissible. The one church consists of several Christian communions that are one in the essentials of the faith and recognize one another on this basis. Reformed theologians persisted in hoping that one day the divided churches would gather in a universal council and confess together the fundamental truths of the gospel.
22. In the course of the centuries, Reformed churches were at the origin of many initiatives toward unity—both internal and intra-confessional. The hardening of the Reformed tradition into Reformed orthodoxy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and resulting splits provoked counter-movements. Both in Pietism and the revival movements, the quest for unity was alive. In spite of numerous challenges Reformed theologians played an outstanding role in the beginning and shaping of the modern ecumenical movement (e.g. F.F. Ellinwood, William Paton, Wilfred Monod and Adolf Keller). The thought of some Reformed theologians had a decisive influence on the nascent ecumenical movement (e.g., Karl Barth, John Mackay, Lesslie Newbigin, Hendrikus Berkhof). It is often said that to be Reformed is to be ecumenical. This has, no doubt, been clearly visible in the history of Reformed churches worldwide. The WCRC takes very seriously the call to Christian unity and ecumenical partnerships.
23. In some senses we hope to use the 2017 Reformation celebrations to get closer to the vision of Christian unity. The WCRC stated clearly at its constitution in Grand Rapids, in 2010, that it is *called to communion and committed to justice*. We see the call to communion as not only strengthening the relationships within the Reformed family but also actively working for Christian unity and witness in the world.
24. In addition to our association with the JDDJ, during the WCRC General Council we will sign a “Wittenberg Witness” with the Lutheran World Federation in Wittenberg. The latter document, drawn from the Reformed and Lutheran dialogue, is intended to give *visible* expression of Christian unity and witness in the world. It’s taking the next step of the dialogues into a higher level. Perhaps this will serve as a symbolic commitment to the process to unity, especially in the presence of other denominations.
25. Wittenberg, we believe, is an important venue for this event because it symbolically represents the breakup of the unity of the Christian church in the 16th century. In the 500th anniversary of the Luther Reformation, it would be most powerful to turn the tide around and communicate a new message. Wittenberg can now be the symbol of renewal of the church and the hope that the division of the church can be healed. In keeping with its strong calling to communion, the WCRC aims to celebrate the 2017 Reformation by working towards Christian unity and deeper ecumenical engagement and partnerships. This is what the WCRC brings to the celebration.
26. Fourthly, the WCRC sees the 2017 Reformation anniversary as the ideal time for renewal and transformation. In a rapidly changing world it is important to ask fresh questions about the relevance and contributions of the Reformed tradition and faith. The WCRC seeks to engage this as it seeks renewal in its mission, justice, theology and spirituality. I shall return to this discussion in the third section of this address where I will focus on the vision and future of the WCRC. For now, I trust that we are able to see and appreciate some reasons as to why the WCRC is also participating in the Martin Luther 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation Anniversary.
27. The 16th century Reformation is known as a turning point in history. It was aimed at getting the teachings of the church and the life of the people in line with the Word of God. It was an era of great change as it transformed both church and society. Its huge impact and contributions continue to live with us today. The WCRC celebrates the Reformation, including the Luther Reformation, with the hope and prayer for Christian unity, a renewed commitment to mission, justice, and ecumenical engagement. In light of the contextual realities in the world today and the shift of Christianity to the Global South, the WCRC is praying and working for renewal in Reformed theology and spirituality. We join the 2017 celebrations with the hope and joyful anticipation of God’s Spirit continuing to transform both the church and the world.

#### **From Grand Rapids to Leipzig: Organizational Matters**

28. Indeed the journey from Grand Rapids to Leipzig has not been an easy one, yet filled with joys and anticipation of the emergence of something new and refreshing in the work, witness and life of the WCRC.

29. By 2011 we discovered that the WCRC was not a financially healthy organization. Whilst we were managing to sustain our programmes, the funding for our core budget (salaries and administration) was just not adequate to keep the WCRC afloat. It was only a matter of time before we were destined to hit the financial crunch. We had to think creatively and decisively as to how we were going to manage the financial crisis. We knew that cutting down on an already small office staff was not going to be the way out if we were to continue to maintain relevance and effectiveness in what we do as an organization.
30. After much deliberation, consultation and debate the Executive Committee of the WCRC decided to move from Geneva to Hannover, Germany. This move was necessary because we came to believe that it was far too expensive to remain in Geneva, and the exchange rate from US\$ and Euros to Swiss francs was not doing us any good. In fact, to say the truth, had we still been in Geneva the WCRC would have gone bankrupt. Thank God that the move to Hannover has put us in a safe and stable position, even though we still have challenges.
31. It was, of course, not an easy decision to leave Geneva. We had tried our level best to stay by conversing with other ecumenical partners, our member churches and the Swiss Canton but, in as much as they were all willing to assist us; it simply was not going to be possible to remain in Geneva, from a financial point of view. We are grateful to our Member Churches there who really tried their best in this regard.
32. We realized that there was much to lose in making such a move. In my 2013 report to the Executive Committee I spelt out this loss: "It is true that we have much to lose when we move out of Geneva. Geneva is the heart of Reformation history and experience as we consider the work and contributions of Reformers such as John Calvin, etc. Another great sense of loss is the presence and contacts we have with other ecumenical partners in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. This is probably unmatched in any other part of the world since contacts with the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Lutheran Federation (LWF) and the many others put us in touch and in tune with world issues, ecumenical engagement together, helps us to back up our meetings with the WCC at times to save travel costs, and gives us access to numerous ecumenical experts and experiences which we ordinarily would not be able to encounter elsewhere. However, the decision to move to Hannover is now made and as we make this move, to be completed by the end of 2013, we need to ask significant questions about our future ecumenical life, partnerships, priorities and strategies. What ecumenical contours or focus will the move to Hannover bring to the WCRC?" I cite this to express the pain and dilemma of having to make that decision to move. It was not easy!
33. The Executive Committee, through the officers, set out a process which involved sending professional evaluators to at least 4 different parts of the world to assess the issue of location, and called for Member Churches to invite and dream-up the possibilities of the WCRC moving to their country or location. The response was not very good in the latter. Some Member Churches responded but most among them were not able to provide any financial assistance or support to the WCRC. The option presented by the Reformed Alliance, in Hannover, was then pursued and the rest is history. I make this point to illustrate the time, effort and care that was taken in attempting to locate a new venue for the WCRC office.
34. We are very grateful to the Reformed Alliance and the Uniting and United Churches in Germany who received us very warmly and went out of their way to make our move there a very smooth transition. We are also thankful for the added resources that they had brought into sustaining the work of the WCRC. I know that there have been some concerns about the possibility of a "German take over" of the WCRC. However, I can unreservedly assure you that this is not the case. Whilst we are expected to fit into the German context and abide by their rules and regulations in the running of an organization, we have by all means managed to secure our right of practice as an International organization. I wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to our General Treasurer, Dr. Johann Weusmann, for his hard and diligent work in sorting out all the legalities and even managing to get us something of a diplomatic status in Hannover.
35. We are now well settled in Hannover and even though there is a sense of ecumenical isolation from what we had before, we have managed to give greater value and effort in developing our ecumenical partnerships and work. In fact we have developed even stronger ties in most places. We are grateful for the contact and support we get from the EKD (the Evangelical Church in Germany) and other organizations based in Germany.

## Finance

36. We thank God that our financial situation is now fairly stable. We express our sincere thanks and appreciation to our General Treasurer, and others, for the incredible work done to raise funds and sustain the budget. We are incredibly blessed with well-structured mechanisms in place to manage our finances, draw up budgets, ensure updated financial reports and undertake proper financial audits. We are grateful to the EKD High Audit Office for their good work and the Finance Committee for their regular meetings and involvement.
37. I must admit, however, that there are concerns about the future prospects of financial growth. We definitely need more financing of our core budget. Whilst we are thankful for the support that we have received from our Member Churches and others in Germany, we must accept that it is not viable to be so reliant on the latter source. We were fortunate to raise a substantial amount of funding from Germany to hold this General Council but I sincerely wonder whether it is something we will be able to do again in the future. I have great concerns about this, our financial

ability to hold future General Councils. What we receive from our member churches is not adequate to sustain the work of the WCRC.

38. For a long time we have been blessed that, though our funds for our core budget were diminishing, the budgets for our programmes were well sustained. We are absolutely grateful to our ecumenical partners who have wonderfully supported our work, mainly our Theology and Justice Work. However, some of these organizations are also going through financially challenging times. We are thankful that they have not altogether stopped their financial contributions but have, in some cases, reduced their support. We are pleased to report at this point that many of our ecumenical partners are seeking to be more connected with our programmes rather than run their own. They are showing high appreciation for what we are doing and increasingly desiring to be a part of the work we are engaging.
39. I wish to express our sincere thanks to the Council for World Mission (CWM) who gave us a million pounds to set aside as an endowment to help ensure the financial sustainability of the WCRC. Their generous contribution and support for the WCRC speak volumes about their commitment and endeavour to see us succeed. Thank you so much!
40. We have been working on a strategic fundraising plan. The Executive Committee requested the officers to appoint a team of professional people to assist us with a development fund and financial sustainability plan. This is still in progress as gathering such a group is challenging in our global context.
41. It is absolutely essential and critical that the WCRC gives time, energy and effort to embark on plans for financial sustainability if we are to secure our future. It is clearly evident that we need additional sources of income, other than that of our member churches, if we are to successfully go about our calling and work. It is imperative that this be followed up by the next Executive Committee as well.

### Strategic Plan

42. In 2010, immediately after the Uniting General Council, a group of people met at my request to draw up a strategic plan for the WCRC. Although the General Council gave a very clear mandate of being *called to communion and committed to justice*, it was necessary to set a clear direction and programme plan for the organization.
43. The Strategic Planning Team drew up a really fantastic plan to guide the work of the then newly formed WCRC. They drafted a new Vision and Mission Statement together with values that should undergird the work, life and witness of the organization. Additionally, in line with the Vision and Mission Statement they proposed five key directions for the WCRC: *mission, communion, justice, theology and ecumenical engagement*. Since I have spoken about these quite extensively in my reports to the Executive Committee over the past years I would not elaborate on these any further. They can be accessed on the WCRC website. In any case the booklet *From Grand Rapids to Leipzig* covers this quite adequately and so will the general secretary's report.
44. I am pleased to report that the Executive Committee had fully endorsed the Vision and Mission Statement and the five key directions in 2011, which then became the guiding post for our continued work. Our programme activities and work agenda were driven by these directives.
45. Unfortunately, from 2011 to 2013 we were quite occupied with internal issues related to finance, relocation, the move to Hannover and the appointment of new staff, including a new general secretary. Whilst we may have succeeded in continuing our work in those trying times, it can be said that our work of delivery on our vision, mission and strategic direction took a little bit of a distraction and dive.
46. However, this was soon rectified in our revised strategic plan in which we consciously engaged specific actions in each of the key directions (the general secretary will report on these). I am pleased to report that we have managed to successfully implement those and it has created a new energy and set the WCRC on a new wave of acceptance, recognition and call for assistance by our member churches and partner organizations. We are most thankful to God for this wonderful turn-around and the high appreciation, impact and value the WCRC seems to be having, especially as we address global issues. We come to this General Council knowing that the WCRC is in a very sound, stable and productive place as it continues to engage God's mission in the world.

### Staff Matters

47. We are really grateful to the staff in the WCRC global office for their work in their respective fields and portfolios. Most of the staff from Geneva did not go with us to Hannover, and understandably so, since it had personal implications. We are thankful for the work done by the Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, in his role then as general secretary, in overseeing the move to Hannover and setting up the office in the new location. We are most grateful to the staff in our Geneva office who decided not to relocate to Germany. Their years of valuable and faithful work would always be appreciated and valued. A special thanks to Kristine Greenway who served as Executive Secretary for Communications.
48. I wish to express a sincere word of gratitude to Dr. Nyomi for his 14 years of service to WARC and the WCRC. Indeed, his years of faithful service has stood us in good stead and helped us to make huge achievements. We wish him, his dear wife and family God's continued blessings and strength in their ministry in Ghana.

49. We are thankful for the coming on board of the new general secretary, the Rev. Dr. Chris Ferguson. His energy, ecumenical vision, contacts and ability to drive the strategic vision of the WCRC have tremendously enabled us to sustain and lift the profile of the WCRC. This is evident in the many requests we get for collaboration and solidarity accompaniment with member churches and partner organizations.
50. I wish to recognize with thanks and appreciation the work of the Rev. Dr. Douwe Visser, as Executive Secretary of Theology, Communion and Mission, over many years. Douwe moved with the WCRC to Hannover. Unfortunately, due to major knee surgery that would effectively see him out of work for at least nine months, Douwe opted for early retirement at the end of July 2017, and this has allowed the position to become vacant. We have engaged the services of others to assist us with his responsibilities, especially as we were preparing for the 2017 General Council.
51. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Rev. Dora Arce-Valentin for her work as Executive Secretary of Justice and Partnership. Dora came in at a difficult time in the thick of our financial crisis and relocation to Hannover. In spite of our challenges she has done her level best to continue the work within her given position. We appreciate her presence, personality and work done over the years. Dora's term in this position comes to an end in December 2017. We wish her well in her future ministry.
52. Phil Tanis, Executive Secretary for Communications, has done much to improve the communications portfolio. We are now managing to translate much of our material into at least eight different languages. We have tremendously improved in the use of our website and social media. We express our thanks to Phil for his continued work in this area and look forward to further new developments to improve in our communication abilities and potential.
53. The move to Hannover has resulted, as expected, with virtually a new complement of staff. We are thankful for their service in their respective responsibilities and trust that they would continue to enjoy their work with the WCRC. We did experience some challenges in the time of transition but these have been attended to with care and satisfaction.
54. The vacant positions of Executive Secretary for Theology and Executive Secretary for Justice have created with Douwe's retirement and Dora's term coming to an end, a gap in the office. The officers, in consultation with the Executive Committee, decided to proceed with attempting to fill the said positions in order to allow for effective continuation of the WCRC work. The positions have been reworked and structures in the office have been redesigned to meet our needs. At the time of the writing of this address the process of appointing the new executive secretaries is almost completed. Hopefully, we may be able to report on this to the General Council.

#### **President's Work**

55. It was a joy and pleasure to visit member churches, general assemblies and special events and give addresses and academic papers in different places throughout the past years. It was good to visit with the WCRC regions and get acquainted with their struggles and joys, and to be able to chart the way forward in a number of troubled areas. It was encouraging to know that many people still look to the WCRC for leadership, support and guidance on a number of issues. We have been called upon to help in a number of areas, especially with significant matters that are bringing huge challenges to our member churches, e.g. human sexuality, leadership struggles, church conflicts, peace initiatives, etc. We are, indeed, glad that we are able to assist and journey with our fellow members in some ways and, hopefully, helping to make a difference.
56. The challenges in relocation, financial constraints, dealing with staff matters, and all other issues within the WCRC within the past seven years has required much of my time and energy. It has certainly been taxing, especially the last few years, but it has been a tremendous joy to be involved in the work of the WCRC. It is now an even greater joy to know that in spite of all our challenges we have a very strong and ready WCRC to move into the next phase of our work.
57. Much of my work in the past years, together with the General Secretaries, has also related to journeying with churches in conflict situations. I am glad that most of these have turned out really well and member churches have been able to move forward in unity and strength.
58. The past two years was also occupied with the preparations for the 2017 General Council. It has been an absolute joy to work with the most incredibly gifted, creative and hardworking people. They have given so much of their time and devotion in working with every detail to make this a successful meeting. Many people have assisted us with a variety of important things. I express my thanks to all of them and especially to the General Council Planning Committee, General Secretary Chris Ferguson and General Council Coordinator Hanns Lessing for their hard and diligent work.

#### **Member Churches**

59. Member churches are crucial to the life and work of the WCRC. The organization counts on the support and involvement of member churches. We are here to serve you and to assist you in tackling issues that you are not able to engage because of various limitations. In the same breath our task is to help mobilize awareness and involvement of member churches on global issues. This calls for solidarity, advocacy and unity as we address vital issues in the world.
60. Member churches have to assume their role and responsibilities within the WCRC family. We need to understand

that membership is not just a theoretical exercise to say that we belong to the organization. Whilst this is necessary in the first instance, what is needed is an active participation and involvement in the work of the WCRC. It is effectively the members who are the people who carry the name, ethos, beliefs and practices of the organization. In essence the WCRC lives through its members who give it life, form and movement in the 109 countries in the world where it is found. You keep the organization alive in the interim period of the seven years when the General Council meets.

61. Member churches have to equally bear responsibility to ensure the financial sustainability of the WCRC. We do this most responsibly when we pay our membership fees as a first and obvious sign of commitment and fellowship. It is thus concerning that there are many member churches that have simply ignored the numerous attempts to engage them in fulfilling this responsibility. A decision was taken by the Executive Committee to withdraw the privileges of membership to member churches who have not paid their membership fees since the inception of the WCRC. However, this was always exercised with grace and caution.
62. We are aware that there are member churches that find it extremely challenging to pay the basic amounts requested in membership fees. We, of course, need to be mindful of this as we relate to justice issues and the genuine inability of some of them to pay. We also need to realize that if we perceive contributions to the life and work of the WCRC only in economic and material terms then we have succumbed to a very narrow perspective of what the Communion is all about. We are enriched by the very presence of others different from us and varied in what they have to offer in and through their very own life experiences, culture, gifts and presence. We learn from their experiences and encounter in life what it means to be part of the same body of Jesus Christ. Ecumenism is not just about economics as we address the concerns about the poor but it is also about *all* the gifts found in the house of God to help make a difference in the world as we together proclaim the fullness of life in the Risen Lord.
63. I cannot stress enough that member churches should participate most actively in the life and work of the WCRC at regional level, in programmatic activities, financial contributions and personal involvement. A successful building of this would ensure the relevance and continuity of the WCRC into the future. I therefore call on members churches that tend to retreat into the woods after the General Council to continue their commitment and involvement with the WCRC family at all levels but especially at the regions.

#### **WCRC Vision and Future**

64. Over the past seven years, together with the officers and the Executive Committee, I have attempted to provide a visionary leadership and outlook for the WCRC. As my term draws to a close, I consider it appropriate to share with you some of those thoughts, simply because they are still relevant and applicable. It is an indication of what we have been striving to do and, perhaps, it might be helpful to the future leadership of the WCRC and a wider audience at the General Council. Hence what I propose to do in this section is to draw together, and largely repeat, some of the things I have been saying over the past years.
65. Five hundred years ago the Reformation was a call for the renewal and reform of the church which certainly impacted on society. Now, five hundred years later, the call for renewal and transformation has become even greater as we deal with the complex challenges of a suffering world and a struggling and divided Church.
66. It is in this context that we pray: "Living God, renew and transform us". So where does the WCRC need renewal and transformation? I shall now proceed to share some thoughts about this as I point out our continued direction into the future. I will offer a summary at the end of each point to capture what has been said and, more significantly, offer it as themes to be considered for our future programme activities.

#### **Renewal of our Commitment to Unity and Justice**

67. The focus of the WCRC is on building communion and justice. This is, indeed, a necessary combination because we cannot build communion without justice and we cannot have justice without working for unity at the same time. Although the WCRC has been saying this all along yet it seems to place these in different camps of emphasis and responsibility. There are some who care more for unity and others more for justice. However, we need to accept both dimensions with equal care and responsibility. This is why I have intentionally placed them together in this section rather than talk about them as separate entities.
68. It is heartening to note that in a special WCRC consultation on Communion participants expressed the depth and connectedness of communion and its link with justice. The following statement out of that consultation expresses this well: "Participants shared the conviction that communion is a gift from God. It is the gift of *koinonia* that the life of Jesus exemplified. Through this *koinonia* or *communio* we participate in the body of Christ especially through baptism and the Lord's Supper. This participatory aspect is very essential. We are invited to participate into something that is there already as a gift. It is not us building up something that we then open for ourselves and for others. Communion is first of all experienced in the congregation where we worship. It is also experienced in a wider context when churches of the same confession or crossing the confessional borders come together sharing the full participation into the body of Christ. In that sense, WCRC seeks to be the body in which the gift of communion is

- lived out in a manner that provides a forum for the member churches to participate in the body of Christ in full communion. This is expressed by the conviction that WCRC is “called to communion.”
69. The participants at the consultation were also convinced that the gift of communion leads to a deep commitment to justice. The commitment to justice is the way to live out the communion: “The call for justice requires our churches to listen deeply to those who suffer and to act in solidarity with them, even when it is costly to us. In responding to this call, we experience God’s gift of communion to us.”
  70. It is interesting that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are recognized as the expression of our “gift” of unity in the consultation statement. However, these sacraments have become the source of our disunity rather than what visibly signifies our unity as Christians in the body of Christ. The WCC General Secretary Dr. Olav Tveit, describes the challenges around the Eucharist as “one of the theological and pastoral battlefields of the Reformation” (2015: 92)). They are what Faith and Order identifies as “the most difficult issues facing the churches in overcoming any remaining obstacles to their living out the Lord’s gift of communion: our understanding of the nature of the Church itself” (Ibid; 94).
  71. The above paragraph refers mainly to the different confessions or church traditions. However, worse still is the fact that within the Reformed family we have also allowed theological, cultural and contextual issues to divide us at the Lord’s Table. For example, I have seen people refuse to take Holy Communion when administered by a woman priest. The unity that Christ calls us into requires that we deal with all dividing lines and barriers so that we reflect the glory of God in unity and justice.
  72. Getting back to the separation of communion and justice, I am pleased to report that we have rectified this in our organizational and management structures of the WCRC as well by linking communion and justice, careful thought and changes have been made in the job descriptions of the Executive Secretaries and structure of the Global Office to address this matter.
  73. The Belhar Confession, as well, clearly affirms the call to be one church and to stand firmly against any injustice that denies the call to be one human family. It makes three key affirmations about unity. First, it states that unity is “both a gift and an obligation.” It is God’s gift and intention of uniting all humanity and the earth. However, it is also an obligation because God expects us to work towards the same. Second, unity must become visible. This is a clear call and expression of Belhar. Third, unity must be active. Christians must be actively working for unity among themselves which should also lead to serve the cause of unity in the world.
  74. Belhar also linked unity with reconciliation and restorative justice. It indicated clearly and emphatically that God is “the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people.” It went further to state that “God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.” In this breath it called on the church to stand with the poor and to work against injustice. It established in a solid way that the church is called to be both, a unity-seeking church and a justice-seeking church, as it seeks to transform the world in the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.
  75. The WCRC is called to stand with the poor. This is an essential basis for our renewal and transformation, as also taught by the reformers. Their work in *justice* extended into formulating new social policies to address the care and concern of the poor, resulting in major economic and social change. For example, Luther made provision in Wittenberg for the city council to provide low-interest loans for workers, subsidies for education and training for the children of the poor, taxes to support the poor – all designed to prevent as well as alleviate poverty (Pillay 2002). Holding to the two “kingdoms” theory, one *spiritual* and the other *civil*, Luther believed that the task of social change was essentially for the secular ruler. However, he maintained that Christians cannot live exclusively in either the spiritual or civil kingdom.
  76. Calvin, emphasizing the sovereignty of God, took the believer’s responsibility in the world more seriously than Luther. W. F. Graham observes that: “For Calvin the world was to be taken seriously, and for him the real world involved shoemakers, printers, and clockmakers, as well as farmers, scholars, knights, and clergymen. Calvin’s world-affirming theology is quite apparent” (Graham 1971:91). Thus Calvin as a theologian and pastor became involved in everyday matters as diverse as the high cost of dying, hospitals, sumptuary laws and the regulation of business and industry and the question of wages in Geneva. He considered no area as too secular to be of legitimate Christian concern.
  77. The Reformers generally advocated an involvement with the world and attempted to transform society as they took up the challenges and concerns of the poor. Today we live in a world in which the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. We are experiencing continued oppression, poverty, human trafficking, racism, caste and ethnic divisions, xenophobia, migration of people, refugee challenges, religious violence and climate change. There is a need to commit to justice. The WCRC sees the 2017 Reformation as a renewed commitment to justice and peace in the world. In 2004 the then-WARC formulated the Accra Confession in which it called for economic justice, gender justice and ecological justice. It was also further affirmed by the Uniting General Council in 2010. The WCRC brings this afresh to the 2017 Reformation celebration with a renewed call and commitment to justice in the world.
  78. The WCRC has done well with its vision for Christian unity as can be seen in our dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran World Federation, Pentecostals, etc. Heading to the Barmen Declaration and the Belhar



Confession we are seeking visible unity of Christian witness in the world. A suffering and struggling world is in dire need for Christians to stand together to bring about renewal and transformation. We are better and stronger together in Jesus Christ!

79. Our efforts, as mentioned earlier, of the Wittenberg Witness and the JDDJ are fruitful endeavours to continue the struggle for unity and justice. We need to continue to cooperate, collaborate and work with other Christian communions, ecumenical organizations and churches. We cannot rest content, if we are to take the prayer of Jesus seriously in John 17: "Father that they may be *one*." The call for Christian unity is both a gift from God and the prayer of Jesus. We need to always keep this in mind as the goal for ecumenism and the creating of community. And we must keep at it faithfully bearing in mind Calvin's words: "I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need were, on account of it."
80. However, as we seek unity and justice with other churches and of the world in building human community, we also need to be mindful that it begins at home. There are numerous challenges that we face within the WCRC family that warrants introspection, renewal and transformation.
81. Embracing diversity and gifts within our Communion requires that we build our fellowship mindful of inequalities, exclusions and economic power. Our relationship must be centred in Christ who taught us the way of humility, love and care. This is what Paul calls for in the sharing of resources as part of creating *koinonia*: "*Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*" (Philippians 2:4). He then goes on to plead: "*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*"
82. Our challenge is to build our fellowship as we address inequalities, embrace diversity and share resources. Our giving to another is not to be a burden but a gift: the gift of blessing, caring and joyfully offering the gifts of God given to us to others.
83. We need to consider seriously how to encourage this within the WCRC family. We should ensure that all our programmes, workshops and activities consciously embrace the variety of gifts, contexts, diversity and differences we have within the Communion. We need to provide space for people to share, learn and discover new things from one another. These are important initiatives for our own transformation and renewal.
84. Our unity is at risk because of the current climate of issues that tend to separate us. Internal division remains a characteristic of the Reformed family. While in some countries reunion of divided Reformed churches was successfully achieved (e.g. United States, Holland), the movement of dividing continues in other countries (e.g. Korea and parts of Africa). Reformed churches easily succumb to divisions. The history of the Reformed churches since the Reformation is a history of multiple divisions, and unfortunately the trend continues. Reformed churches have a tendency to split. In almost all countries in the world there is more than one Reformed church. Whilst this may be in some places the result of church planting by different missionary efforts, these are usually brought about by divergences over doctrinal or ethical issues or over aspects of church government or political options. In recent times the issues of the ordination of women and human sexuality has led to further divisions and strife. In such a context we need to hear afresh the need for Reformed churches to be driven by the agenda of unity and justice. Whilst diversity may be one of the strengths which keep the Reformed family together, it is becoming increasingly apparent that it may also be its weakness.
85. Theological diversity and ethical issues continue to divide us as Reformed Christians. It is sad to see these things destabilizing, fragmenting and disintegrating churches today. We are witnessing splits in denominations, severance of long-standing denominational partnerships, and a "zero-tolerance" approach justifying separation and disunity. These have already found their way into the WCRC and our tendency is to shy away from these realities without choosing to get too involved in specific matters and situations. This, of course, is the 'safe' option but one wonders for how long it would be possible to maintain this stance.
86. In my view the WCRC should be a platform and a facility to help embrace diversity and differences. However, it would be required in time to do more than this – or rather to do it with more effort, energy and care. In my opinion the WCRC would need to play a role in the following ways: 1) *guiding* scriptural and theological interpretations, 2) creating a *safe space* for honest engagement, 3) helping to *sustain* church or denominational partnerships and relationships, and 4) *shaping* a new direction in addressing diversity and differences.
87. I am pleased to report that we have already started to work on the subject of human sexuality which has become one of the most divisive issues. A consultation with representatives from different perspectives would take place sometime after the General Council to engage dialogue on the issues of human sexuality and the challenges it poses to the church. The intention is not to take a position on the matter but to strongly assert that unity and justice should take prominence in such debates. How can we preserve the unity and witness of the church in the midst of differences and divergent expressions of views?
88. I am also pleased to report that this General Council would be taking seriously the challenges we face within the WCRC about the recognition and acceptance of women in the leadership of the church. In fact, this was already said by decision of the 2010 Uniting General Council which called for the recognition of women in ministry to be "binding" on the WCRC. The task group commissioned to work on this by our executive secretary for justice and

partnership found it necessary to call for a “Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women” as a serious measure in moving forward on this matter. This declaration will be presented to the General Council. I know that this may not go down well with some of our member churches that still do not ordain women in ministry. However, it is a road we must travel if we are to remain true to what we believe as a Communion.

89. *To summarize this section, the WCRC focus on communion and justice warrants new conversations as we reflect on what separates, threatens and challenges the unity of churches today. As we address the issue of unity, it should also be coupled with the commitment to justice. This necessary combination is a valuable basis and source for our continued renewal and transformation.*

### **Renewal of Reformed Theology and Spirituality**

90. Central to the 16th century Protestant Reformation is allegiance to the authority of the Bible as God’s word; continuing recognition of that authority is basic to our identity in Christ as guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In Reformed theology, we affirm our focus on the sovereignty of God, covenantal theology, the priesthood of all believers, *solus Christus, sola Scriptura, sola fide, sola gloria, sola gratia*, etc. Today we are realizing that these “principles” of the Reformation have to be subject to scrutiny and possible reinterpretation. However, this should not be strange to Reformed teachings which stress *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*—the Reformed church is always reforming. We need to submit our own traditions and ambitions to constant reformation by the Spirit as we live as followers of Jesus Christ in ever changing cultures.
91. Let me illustrate what I am saying by referring to the principle of *sola Scriptura*. At the heart of the Reformation was the quest to return to the Bible. The Reformation saw a new importance being attached to Scripture—or, perhaps, an ancient view of the importance of Scripture being recovered. The idea of *sola Scriptura*, “by Scripture alone,” became one of the great slogans of the Reformers as they sought to bring the practices and beliefs of the church back into line with those of the golden age of Christianity. According to McGrath (2012: 91), if the doctrine of justification by faith alone was the material principle of the Reformation, the principle of *sola Scriptura* was its formal principle.
92. Mainstream Reformers had no difficulty with the notion of a “traditional interpretation” of the Bible. In fact they advocated that they were not attempting to start a new church but were seeking to reform and renew Christianity, which implied affirming continuity with the great historic tradition of Christian faith, stretching back through the patristic era to the apostles themselves. For example, Calvin asserted that the institutions and regulations of both church and state were required to be grounded in Scripture. Zwingli stated that “the foundation of our religion is the written word, the Scriptures of God.” Heinrich Bullinger stated that the authority of Scripture was absolute and autonomous: “Because it is the Word of God, the holy biblical Scripture has adequate standing and credibility in itself and of itself” (McGrath 2012:97). Such views indicate the consistently high view of Scripture adopted by the Reformers. It represents a major point of continuity with medieval theology.
93. The difference between the Reformers and medieval theology at this point concerns how Scripture is *defined* and *interpreted*, rather than the *status* that it is given. It is this interpretation of Scripture in a changing world that becomes a crucial element for renewal and transformation. It is a stark reminder that the Reformation can not only be discussed in terms of its ecclesial meaning but also in its relation to culture as a whole. The issue of context and biblical interpretation becomes a serious matter of importance.
94. The Bible is a central document of western civilization, not only as the source of Christian ideas but also as an influence upon education and culture. Today this is being seriously challenged as we question the “hermeneutical lens” we tend to use in interpreting Scripture. Further, the critical question is “Who is interpreting Scripture and for whom?” Gerald West (2009), speaking into the South African context, makes the point that the Bible has always been at the centre of the liberation struggle even though it has been categorized as a tool of oppression. For example, it was used as the tool to build an apartheid South Africa, but equally it was used as the key text of the struggling masses in South Africa for liberation and justice.
95. The above point establishes the need for Reformed theology to seek renewal and transformation in the area of further understanding *sola Scriptura*; the focus is not only on *what* the interpretation is but, more significantly, on “*who*” is interpreting. The Reformed faith has the obligation of protecting the text from being co-opted by the powerful and the elite and, thereby, giving vent and expression to the “voice” of the poor, marginalized and oppressed masses. How do the latter groups inform biblical interpretation? How can this become a source for renewal and transformation? In the context of the Global South critical biblical interpretation and application of Scripture has become the norm. Whilst Reformed theology and tradition has taught us to do this, contextual realities aligned to the quest for justice and peace has taken it even further.
96. Whilst Reformed theology and tradition may have the same substance of faith and belief, as expressed above, it does not mean that it has the exact same impact in different contexts. Hence what is needed as a sign of renewal and transformation is a contextual reading and adaption of Reformed teaching and beliefs. For example, in Africa we need to ask what value and significance the Reformed faith can have in the context of poverty, religious violence,

- civil factions, political instability and dictatorship. In the western world it may be necessary to dialogue the Reformed faith in the context of capitalism, empire, refugees, Brexit, etc.
97. For example, the Kairos Document has helped us to see how (Reformed) theology can be used and misused in the South African context. It identified three types of theology: state theology (which justified apartheid), church theology (the liberal voice that remained essentially silent) and prophetic theology (which denounced apartheid calling it a heresy). In light of the experiences in the world today the WCRC is called upon to exercise a prophetic voice which it did in opposing apartheid in South Africa.
  98. As expressed above, the WCRC senses the need for *theological renewal* and transformation. Thus we see the 2017 Reformation anniversary as the space for what some have described as the “Second Reformation,” especially acknowledging that the centre of Christianity has shifted to the Global South. Huibert van Beek points out that the shift is not only geographical, but also confessional with the rapid growth of modern Pentecostalism (2009: vii).
  99. John W. de Gruchy in his book, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, states that Reformed Theology “is best understood as a liberating theology that is catholic in its substance, evangelical in principle, and socially engaged and prophetic in its witness” (1991: Xii). He points out that while Reformed tradition may be liberating in intent, it has also been guilty of legitimating oppression in practice. He thus establishes that one way of doing Reformed theology is to enter into dialogue with the various forms of liberation theology at work in the contemporary church. Whilst this has been now done to some extent, in my opinion, we need to do more.
  100. It is commendable that the WCRC is periodically bringing young Reformed theologians together in the Global Institute of Theology (GIT) where they are grappling with our current realities and new expressions of theological engagement. These critical and relevant reflections must be encouraged if we are to encourage renewal and transformation in theological thinking. Young theologians need to reflect on new contextual and global theologies and what these have to say to our understanding of Reformed theology today.
  101. Essential to the Reformation is the doctrine of justification by faith alone: *sola fide*. The theme of “redemption through Christ” is central throughout the New Testament, Christian worship and Christian theology. The term “soteriology” is used in Christian theology to communicate the images which describe the redemption achieved through the death and resurrection of Christ. McGrath (2012) points out that there are five broad components to this network of ideas: images of victory, images of a changed legal status, images of changed personal relationships, images of liberation and images of restoration to wholeness. All of these images, no doubt, describe renewal and transformation.
  102. It is not my intention here to get stuck in the theological debates of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is interesting to note that though there are differences in Luther’s and Calvin’s thought about this our joint Lutheran-Reformed dialogue have found that they are not significantly different; in essence they attempt to say the same thing.
  103. My point of entry into this discussion for here is to mention that this doctrine provides for us a solid theological undergirding for renewal and transformation. The redemption of Christ through the cross and resurrection provides the basis for renewal and transformation. It is through this act that God in Christ makes all things new. Luther’s focus on the theology of the cross makes this point abundantly clear. How can the cross and the resurrection and faith in Jesus Christ become the basis for renewal and transformation?
  104. The new theological emphasis on individual faith contributed to the growing influence of the new individualistic philosophy. The basic tenet of Protestantism was the doctrine that human beings were justified by faith rather than by works. Each person had to search his or her own heart to discover if acts stemmed from a pure heart and faith in God.
  105. Unfortunately, the new theological focus on individual faith was to strongly influence the economic views of the new middle-class artisans and small merchants. Such people felt quite genuinely and strongly that their economic practices, though they might conflict with the traditional law of the old church, were not offensive to God. On the contrary: they glorified God.
  106. The new doctrines stressed the necessity of doing well at one’s earthly calling as the best way to please God, and emphasized diligence and hard work. These doctrines subsequently led to the spiritualizing of economic processes and the belief that “God instituted the market and exchange” (Pillay 2002). This emphasis, however, sadly took the Christian focus away from the general concern for the community and the obligation to the poor. It gave acceptance to the liberal paradigm: poverty as backwardness, stressing that the poor should be enabled to reach their full potential.
  107. Although this view on poverty has been seriously debated and challenged over the years, we still need to assess how the Reformation relates to imperial capitalism and to the male means-end rationality in science, technology and individualistic calculating mentality (Duchrow 2015). How does this view of *sola fide* stand in need of renewal and reformation is a question we must continue to engage.
  108. John Calvin’s theology took the believer’s responsibility in the world more seriously than Luther. His view on the *sovereignty of God* gave rise to the idea of mission as “extending the reign of Christ” both by inward spiritual

- renewal of individuals and by transforming the face of the earth through filling it with “the knowledge of the Lord.” This particular view led Calvin into bringing about social transformation in Geneva.
109. It stressed the point of *covenantal theology* and laboured the fact that God covenants with all human beings and they are part of the human chain. Calvin employed the traditional organic metaphor for society (as found in Acts 2: 42ff), in which, as he wrote, no member has “power for itself nor applies it to its own private use, but each pours it out to the fellow members;” what chiefly matters is “the common advantage of the whole body” (Inst., 111, vii, 5). Occasionally he identified this community with the whole human race. “All people,” he could maintain, “are bound together as a sacred chain ... [which] ...should be embraced in one feeling of love” (Commentary Acts 13:36; Inst., 11, viii, 55).
  110. Consequently, it is not surprising that Calvin showed a particular concern for the poor which resulted in his attempt to transform his society, especially in Geneva. He concerned himself with the issues of commerce and economic justice. His theology was not disembodied, divorced from the realities of life where labourers and employers are often at odds over economic matters. Calvin realized that because of the nature of humanity and the sinfulness of all of our institutions, our endeavours are to some extent motivated by self-interest, pride, and greed. Yet his is a “world-affirming theology” in the sense that he sought to apply the gospel to all of life. For him, that meant seeking the guidance of scripture for the problems besetting humanity, particularly those besetting the citizens of Geneva.
  111. Given the dynamics of a world in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer and the numbers of people living in poverty and hunger continues to increase, it is important for Reformed theology to make a clear commitment of standing with the poor and oppressed in the world. We need to shift from a “window-dressing” theological approach to an in-depth involvement with the plight of the poor. We need to ask whether our theological positions are life-enhancing and life-affirming; do they follow the Bible in socio-historic precision, in essence, do they contribute to liberation and justice?
  112. In addition, we need to reflect on the Reformation and its historical impact in view of the global threat to humanity and the Earth—both positively and negatively. We are living in difficult times as we experience climate change and witness the devastation of the earth. Reformed theology must awaken to a renewed sense of responding to our given realities and focus on the need of “caring for the earth.” The WCRC needs to engage more meaningful work in this area of environmental issues.
  113. The Accra Confession (2004) is a significant attempt in focusing theology on “covenanting and caring for the earth.” It has outlined and prophetically engaged the issues of economic justice, gender justice and ecological justice. It has rightfully pointed us to these matters and prompted us to respond to the unjust realities of life. Now in this second decade of the Accra Confession we need to ask how this document can be a basis for renewal and transformation for ourselves as the WCRC and for the world at large. The refusal to do this is to not take seriously one of the significant tenets of Reformed theology: the Reformed church is continually reforming.
  114. This also impacts on our understanding of *Reformed spirituality*. Spirituality is the pattern by which we shape our lives in response to our experiences of God as a very real presence in and around us (Rice 1991). To be spiritual is to take seriously our consciousness of God’s presence and to live in such a way that the presence of God is central in all that we do. Such spirituality turns to the world not away from it. It gives attention to the threats of life and embraces the need for justice.
  115. Reformed spirituality is geared towards equipping life-giving transformative engagement in the world. It is a spirituality that is built in community and builds community. Thus, any piety that appears to be content with a personal relationship with Jesus, and which shuns or belittles the horizontal dimension of discipleship, is suspect. Any spirituality that advocates a withdrawal from what is going on in the world is contrary to Christ’s spirit.
  116. This concept of spirituality aligns well with the African concept of *Ubuntu* which says that “I am because of you. I belong therefore I am.” This concept of community is needed to help shape and define our Communion. What does it mean to be a family together as we address diversity and differences? How can member churches hold up the quest for unity in the midst of differing views and theological interpretations? Our quest for renewal and transformation would certainly have to address such relevant questions.
  117. At the centre of Reformed theology is the message of *sola gratia*. It reminds us that grace alone is the source and sustenance of our salvation. God’s provision of saving, sustaining and glorifying grace is the golden thread uniting all Christian scripture and enabling all Christian faithfulness. This means all works honouring God—including our personal sanctification, our love for neighbours and enemies, our zeal for world mission, our free offer of the Gospel, our warnings of judgement, our promises of eternity, our mercy toward the poor and oppressed, our stewardship of God’s world, our battles against Satan, our prayer for God’s blessing, and our work toward Christ’s coming—all find proper motivation and enablement in love for Christ. Of course, this can be misused to use grace to excuse sin, but the principles of grace revealed in all Scripture are the fuel of personal holiness and spiritual revival for those led by the Spirit.
  118. Thus, presenting the doctrines of grace in a warm and embracing way is not to obscure holy boldness but to encourage compassion and humility in the face of God’s sovereign mercy to all he loves from every tribe, language,

people and nation. As the kindness of God has led to repentance and renewal among us, we must be committed to a manner and ministry that reflects God's grace to others (cf. Romans 2:4; 1 Peter 3:15). We must be on guard that the grace message that God has brought to us (or our particular expression of it) does not become a jewel that we admire and adore for the joy it brings us rather than for the hope it offers the world.

119. The critical question is: How do we understand this concept of grace in the light of the new, emerging world experiences impinging on the role of women in society, issues of human sexuality, interreligious encounters and tensions, racism, xenophobia, tribalism, the refugee situation, etc. How do we express grace and hospitality to differing views, theological beliefs and human experiences? All of these impress upon us the need for renewal and transformation as we seek to build inclusive communities and foster better relationships with people of other faiths. These are realities that the WCRC would have to deal with, and it is these that would hopefully bring theological renewal and transformation.
120. *To summarize this quest for theological renewal and transformation, we need to note that for far too long we have engaged theological formation from western perspectives, with the shift of Christianity to the Global South we need to ask how we can embrace learning and discovering from new centres. How can the perspectives of the poor, marginalized, oppressed, etc., inform, shape and direct Reformed theological thinking today? We should ask: What role does confessional, contextual, ecumenical and community thinking have on theological understanding? How do the matters of justice and liberation shape theological formation? Is our theology life-affirming and biblically relevant given the contextual and global realities? Is our theology inclusive and embracing whilst remaining true to what we believe is the Gospel message of love? This calls for radical reformation! The WCRC needs to allow these kinds of questions to direct and shape its continued theological engagement for Reformed theological renewal, transformation and relevance.*

### **Renewal of Church Life, Witness and Structure**

121. D.J. Bosch in his book *Transforming Mission* suggests that mission remains an indispensable dimension of the Christian faith and that, at its most profound level, its purpose is to transform reality around it (Bosch 1999: xv). Mission, in this perspective, is that dimension of our faith that refuses to accept reality as it is and aims at changing it. "Transforming" is, therefore, an adjective that depicts an essential feature of what Christian mission is all about.
122. The church as a community does not exist for itself. It has received a commission; it is sent into the world to proclaim and praise God. It is sent to be a sign, instrument and foretaste of the realization of God's purpose in Christ for the whole humanity and creation. The mission of the church is founded on the sending out of disciples by Christ at the conclusion of his ministry and the empowerment of the Christian community for mission at Pentecost by the gift of the Holy Spirit.
123. The church proclaims in the name of the crucified and risen Lord God's saving grace and love for the whole world. In the midst of sin, brokenness, pain and suffering it proclaims to the world in word and deed that God's salvation, hope, and reconciliation have come into our midst in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It does so in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Mission must mean something more than merely "saving souls"—it must also transform the environment in which people live.
124. The church thus becomes an agent of hope in a suffering and dark world. This is precisely how the Reformers saw the church. Both Luther and Calvin worked for the transformation of society. Our church structures are usually guided by Reformed doctrine, polity and ecclesiology which preserve our identity and tradition. This is a good thing! However, we should still ask key questions related to practice and relevance. Are we meeting the needs of our members and are our churches "free" enough to create space for others? There are at least two new tendencies today that should be taken into consideration. The first is the fact that many denominations and churches today are becoming more *missional* focused. The idea is to relevantly engage God's mission in the world bringing about justice and peace. In fact they are now moving to what is referred to as mission-ecclesiology. There is no doubt that such a focus is going to revive and transform Reformed churches, leading to relevance and growth. Church leaders should consider thinking missionally—a basis for renewal and transformation. The WCRC should help our churches to do this.
125. The second trend today is to consider more intently the presence, power and movement of God's Holy Spirit both in the church and the world. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who brings us renewal and transformation. We need to rely more on the Spirit to change us, bring us to repentance and the discovery of the new life in Jesus Christ. Left on our own, we struggle to change ourselves, but God through the abiding and transforming presence of the Holy Spirit does this in us and through us. It is widely accepted that Pentecostalism is growing in many parts of the world (Huibert van Beek 2009: viii). The WCRC is in dialogue with Pentecostals; what can we learn from them in this regard? We should not be afraid to ask such a question. The WCRC should guide our churches in this regard from lessons that can be learnt from others in the interest of Kingdom building.
126. Some of our churches are inhibited by paternalistic, cultural, ethnic, racial, caste and language barriers. Whilst most of our churches are open to the acceptance of women in leadership, there are others who seriously resist this. The WCRC needs to continue to provide biblical and theological engagement on this matter. The 2010 General Council

took a massive step in stating that the 2017 General Council should consist of an equal number of men and women. Of course, one of the best ways to address this is to increase the participation of women in the highest leadership level of member churches. This is really hard to do from where we sit as the WCRC because member churches have their own views, life and structures and, in short, we cannot tell them what to do. However, I note with gratitude the significant increase in women delegates to this General Council. Well done!

127. Further, as already mentioned, at this General Council we will consider a Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination. Our approval of this Declaration is another step towards openness, inclusivity and hospitality towards all God's people. It is also recognition that women are equally called to serve God both in the church and the world. However, we have a responsibility to journey with member churches who think differently on this subject.
128. The WCRC needs to put more energy and resources into the development and acceptance of Youth in the structures of the organization and within its member churches. The children and youth are very much part of the church today and not relegated to the future alone. They are the ones who will help guide us to the future but it starts with involving them in the present. Church leaders should not feel threatened by the youth; instead they should receive young people as God's gift to bless and enrich the church. Many Reformed churches do not seem to attract and keep young people, often leading to declining membership and irrelevance. We need to find more creative ways of enabling and empowering young people in the local church and even within the structures of the WCRC. We are working on this but we need to do more. A vision to integrate and empower the youth is needed. This leads me to my next point.
129. We may need renewal and transformation in our worship. It is evident that most young people are looking for something more in the experience of worship. How does our liturgy meet their needs? For a large number of people the use of technology, art, drama, visuals and lively singing seem to be quite appealing. How do we cater for these in our worship services so that our members, particularly the youth, do not go church shopping? The WCRC can help member churches to be open to a variety of diverse experiences whilst remaining true to our Reformed identity and liturgy.
130. The "prosperity gospel" seems to become more attractive today, especially in Africa, and thousands of people seem to flock these churches. It is unfortunate that what most of these churches teach is biblically questionable. The WCRC needs to help our churches, especially in Africa, to understand and address these realities from a sound biblical point of view. We may need to engage or connect with researchers on this topic and help Christians to understand what is really being taught. How do we enable our churches to grow without gimmicks and sometimes biblically untenable practices such as calling congregants to eat grass, spray doom and drink petrol, as seen in some parts of Africa?
131. *In this section I have tried to outline some of the areas in which we should seek renewal and transformation in denominations and local churches. The WCRC should help and direct churches in the areas of mission, ecclesiology, women, youth and worship. All of these are essential if we are to experience renewal and transformation as Reformed churches in the world today.*

### ***Institutional Renewal and Transformation***

132. The WCRC is privileged to have a wide membership throughout the world. This is great and it works well in many places, especially where the regions are functioning well. However, we also have situations in which member churches do not participate adequately in the regions and only connect with the global structures, sometimes only when it gets closer to the next General Council. We need to bring renewal and transformation into our structures so that we foster and encourage deep relationship-building at all levels, starting with the regional structures. This is the most obvious way to build true *koinonia*.
133. The regions also face challenges surrounded by theological, doctrinal, ethical, cultural, racial, economic and political divides. We can only be able to transcend these differences by working and spending time together as we seek to understand and apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our contextual realities, and through the power of the Holy Spirit be able to find each other in significant relational ways that enables us to see the face of God in the other. As we learn to respect and love one another as fellow human beings we are able to bring this from one region into the whole WCRC family.
134. We also need to facilitate and encourage regional connections. Regions can provide added encouragement and a sense of learning and sharing of best practices on various matters from one region to another. We need a strategic plan that enables regions to share expertise, resources, struggles, stories and successes with one another. This is vital and essential if we are intentional about building the WCRC family. Such a strategy should empower regions, cross regional boundaries, build bridges of solidarity and care within the WCRC family and beyond.
135. In February 2017 a Regional Empowerment Consultation was held in which each region was well represented. The focus was on understanding the status of regions, leadership of regional councils, role of the vice presidents, formation of regions and power relations, membership of regions in relation to membership of the WCRC, resources and challenges within the regions. This was a really good meeting and I sincerely hope that the decisions at this consultation would be implemented in due course.

136. As part of our institutional renewal and transformation, careful consideration must be given to decentralizing some of our programmes and projects. In this way we can allow for greater regional and member church participation on the ground. It is sensible to note that some of our programmes can be better placed and more effective in certain contexts rather than from the global office. For example, climate change and environmental issues can be in the Pacific, religious violence can be in the Middle East, etc. The task of the global office staff would be to oversee the programme/project and to broaden and extend it to the whole WCRC family. We cannot continue to expect our small staff in Hannover to *do* all this work; we need to develop a culture of shared responsibility and a participatory work ethos within the Communion.
137. As part of our institutional renewal and transformation, the General Council Planning Committee has proposed that we use the consensus/discernment model in making decisions in its full form and depth. This is not new to us. It has been partially used at the General Council in Accra in 2004 and at the 2010 Uniting General Council. The consensus/discernment model usually takes time but it is a process that allows virtually all the participants/delegates to contribute to the decision-making process. People who do not prefer to speak in public are empowered to speak in the small groups. The moderators/facilitators of these groups are trained to encourage free and “safe-space” participation of all members of the group and not just the vocal few. In this sense people go away feeling that they have been heard. This is what we would wish to achieve at the General Council. The model also enables us to create and build community catering for different experiences and views, whilst appreciating and respecting others and applying the fruits of the Spirit. Attempts would be made to accommodate language and embrace diversity.
138. Detailed presentations about the model would be made at the General Council. Let me capture this in a brief description. There are three main stages to this model: 1) *Listening*, 2) *Dialogue* and 3) *Decision*. In the first stage we merely listen to the presentation of the report and may have questions for clarity. The reports are then taken to a number of small groups meeting concurrently for dialogue and discussion on the proposals. The small group is allowed to amend the proposals or to even add new ones as long as they relate to the subject under discussion. These proposals are then passed on to a drafting committee that is tasked to take the various comments from the small groups into consideration and come up with a “consolidated” proposal/s. These are then brought to the Decision Session where further dialogue takes place and a decision is reached by consensus with the use of orange (yes) and blue (no) cards.
139. *Summary: our lives together in the Communion is a shared life in the Triune God. Just as God works in community so we should also learn to work towards building and strengthening the WCRC family. As proposed above, we can do this by relooking at how we work together in the regions, the global WCRC family and how we make decisions together at all levels. It is hoped that these would help to foster communion and justice, bringing renewal and transformation.*

### **Ecumenical Renewal and Commitment**

140. In moving the WCRC Office to Hannover, we were concerned about our loss of ecumenical contact and connectedness. However, I am most grateful that Chris and the staff have worked hard at strengthening our ecumenical ties. This is something that we must continue to do with great effort.
141. We are quite aware that ecumenical organizations are constantly under pressure and are often faced with huge financial challenges. It is thus imperative that we find ways of working together, pooling our resources and engaging effectively on key global issues. This is quite observable in the joint programmes of WCRC, WCC, CWM and LWF on the New Economic and International Financial Architecture (NEIFA) and the Oikotree projects. We need more of this kind of cooperation and collaboration.
142. As a sign of renewal and transformation, it seems that ecumenism is morphing into something new. The tendency is not to function as an institutionally set up organization but as a *network* of Christians working together for the transformation of society. The focus is not on organic unity but on creating a forum for Christians to come together to act on global issues. It is not a communion or *koinonia* but more of an alliance to demonstrate Christian unity and prophetic witness on particular issues. Invariably, there is no discussion on doctrinal issues; the focus is on common witness and service. For example, this can be seen in the work of the Global Christian Forum.
143. The WCRC is a communion (and confessional body), and rightly so, but we need to continue to network and work with other ecumenical organizations and NGOs in the endeavour to engage God’s mission in the world. We need to take seriously our partnerships in the common interest of the “preferential option of the poor.”
144. As we continue to embrace our future, and in the struggle for Christian unity, we need to have before us this picture of an emerging ecumenism which calls us to engage the ecumenical discourse with the following understanding:
- a. We need to be less *institutional* and more *relational* as we network, develop partnerships and work with others in God’s mission in the world. We need to give greater value to such partnerships as we seek to be where God is, among the poor, needy and oppressed.
  - b. We need to realize that the new ecumenical space is not just with ecumenical organizations and church leaders but with ordinary Christians who are daily seeking to understand their faith in a world of conflict,

struggle and suffering. Thus it deems it necessary for us to equip and empower the ecumenical “agents” in the pews and “market place.” We have to follow the work of the Spirit to identify new areas where Christians are finding one another, often by working together to meet the needs of the wider community. What would this mean for future ecumenical vision and work?

- c. In many places, local ecumenical initiatives have contributed to a renewal of local congregational life and the unity of the church becomes a concrete reality. New impulses are also given to regional, national, and international ecumenism by such local efforts. Here the focus is not on ecclesiology but on *mission*. The truth is that national ecumenical movements are being overtaken by reality and they cannot find the drive to keep in flow with the Spirit. This calls for radical re-thinking on how we do ecumenism today in the world. How can we in the WCRC use this to build our member churches, local churches and regions? It seems to me that we need stronger regional structures if we are to truly impact our member churches. But equally member churches need to fully participate in these structures if we are to make it work.
  - d. We can no longer work as independent organizations and churches in ecumenical work; instead we must continue to foster interdependence, cooperation and collaboration. We have done well in our dialogues with the Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Pentecostals, but how do we take this further in the quest for unity in Christian witness, a testimony that the world needs to see. How do we strengthen our ties with the WCC, CWM, EKD, etc.?
  - e. We will need fresh expressions in thinking ecumenical theology as we consider the need for Christian unity and witness in the world. How do we address challenges which breed divisions, separation and distinctive identities? What do we say about confessions and creeds and its use in the quest for unity and mission? We will need to give considerations to these questions as we embrace a new vision for ecumenism and address the fragmentation of churches.
  - f. How do we address the deepest fault lines in ecumenical relationships as we address issues of ideologies especially in terms of race, ethnicity, subculture, class, gender and sexual orientation? These are issues that are dividing churches and creating disunity. Ecumenical organizations will have to address inclusion and exclusion. It will have to assess and reassess its endeavour of serving as an ecumenical platform and of providing a safe space for churches and Christians to share their differences on issues but are still able to remain a part of the Christian family.
  - g. As we consider issues of injustices, the need for security and peace in so many countries, religious factions and fundamentalism, civil wars, etc., we will need to give greater consideration to these in ecumenical dialogues and deliberations. The WCRC needs to put greater effort in interfaith dialogues and work with interfaith movements in the quest of “fullness of life” for all people and life on Earth. This is, unfortunately, an area in which we have been rather weak. I hope that our programmatic strategy for the ensuing years would give due consideration to this area.
145. *In summary, the WCRC needs to continue to strengthen its ecumenical vision and work. We need to give greater consideration to the changing dynamics of ecumenism today realizing the value and significant movements in ecumenism emerging in congregations and among ordinary Christians in the pews and marketplace, which seems to be overtaking denominational and ecumenical leaders. What can we learn from this bottom up approach and how can it stimulate and enhance our ecumenical work? These are some of the questions that should guide our ecumenical endeavours.*
146. I hope what I have offered in this section would be helpful to continue to guide the future vision and programmatic work of the WCRC. We have travelled a long road but the destiny is not (perhaps never) reached.

### Thanks and Appreciation

147. There are many people who keep the WCRC wheels turning at the different levels of the organizational structure from the officers, Executive Committee, global office, regions, member churches and committees. I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to everyone concerned for all their work and effort in keeping the WCRC alive and at work in many places around the world.
148. I wish to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Chris Ferguson (general secretary), the executive secretaries: Douwe Visser, Dora Arce-Valentin, Phil Tanis; specialized assistance from Aruna Gnanadason in theology, Hanns Lessing as General Council coordinator and Gerhard Plenter, our volunteer finance coordinator; all the supporting staff: Claudia Duval, Emelda Ndipewah, and Viktoria Koczian (all of whom have now left us), Katrina Mertz, Anna Krüger, Werner Joecker, Paul Oppenheim and Amritha Perumalla; and our interns who have served in Hannover: Joanna Hipp, Fundiswa Kobo, Wan-Jou Lin, Miguel Roa and Grenna Kaiya. May God continue to bless and sustain them as they serve the WCRC in their respective and various capacities.
149. I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratefulness to the officers for their constant journey, wisdom, support and encouragement. We have had some challenging moments, but they have hung in there strong and well. I appreciate the time and effort they made to connect mainly via Skype and the fruitful and thoughtful contributions they made to our conversations. May God bless and keep each of you in joy, peace and good health.



150. We are truly blessed to have the kind of members who served on the Executive Committee. Thank you for your deep interest in the well-being and work of the WCRC. All that you have done through the past seven years is dearly appreciated and valued. We are where we are as the WCRC because of your interest, involvement and commitment to the organization.
151. I wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all our volunteers, people who work in the different regions, serve on various committees, attend and contribute to our programmes and conversations and bless us in a variety of ways. It is they who sustain the life and work of the WCRC on the ground, where it matters most! Thank you!
152. I would like to recognize with joyful thanksgiving the many organizations and churches that generously and graciously support our work and programmes with financial and other resources, not forgetting particularly the Council for World Mission (CWM), the German churches and UEM. Again a special thanks to all those who contributed so graciously to the fundraising initiatives for the 2017 General Council.
153. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) for their support and understanding in the earlier years of my time as president of the WCRC. Even though I was general secretary of the UPCSA, they availed me the time to do this important work.
154. In September 2014 I joined the Theology Faculty at the University of Pretoria. I became the Head of Department for Church History and Church Polity in January 2015 and in spite of this huge responsibility the dean, as my line manager, never once refused me the opportunity to go about doing the work of the WCRC. I am most grateful to Professor Buitendag and my colleagues at the university for their support and encouragement.
155. Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank my family for their patience, support and love. My wife, Sandra, and children: Jessie, Janice and Aaron have been extremely understanding and supportive given my different roles in the WCRC, the University of Pretoria and the UPCSA. I remain eternally grateful to them for the support and sacrifices they have made during the past seven years. Indeed, I am truly blessed! Hopefully, I would now be able to spend more time with them.

### Conclusion

156. The past seven years was a really fantastic and wonderful time in spite of the challenges we faced financially leading to the need to relocate. These are all part and parcel to running an organization that is dependent on member churches and donors for its on-going work. I am deeply grateful to all who have contributed to bringing the WCRC to where it is now in a reasonably strong and good place. My prayer and hope is that the next Executive Committee would continue to build on the foundation that has been established, to the Glory of God and the good of the WCRC. We wish them God's blessings, wisdom and strength, as we continue to pray: *"Living God, renew and transform us."*

Thank You!

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