



WCRC joins declaration to overcome Reformation divisions

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has formally joined an ecumenical statement with Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Methodists aiming to overcome divisions between Protestants and Roman Catholics from the time of the Protestant Reformation.

“Today is a historic day,” said Jerry Pillay, president of the WCRC, at a ceremony on 5 July in the eastern German town of Wittenberg, where Martin Luther lived and worked. “The documents we are signing today are significant and symbolic of the road we are to travel.”

Pillay was speaking as the WCRC formally associated itself with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, originally signed by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church on 31 October 1999.

“Catholics and Lutherans stated that a ‘consensus in basic truths exists between Lutherans and Catholics’ in regard to the theological controversy which was a major cause of the split in the Western church in the 16th century,” said Bishop Brian Farrell, secretary of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity during in the ceremony.

The declaration stated that mutual condemnations pronounced by the two sides during the Reformation do not apply to their current teaching on justification.

The congregation at Wittenberg’s Stadtkirche (Town Church), broke into spontaneous applause as WCRC General Secretary Chris Ferguson and Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist representatives signed a state-



From left: Jerry Pillay, WCRC president; Brian Farrell, bishop and secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Martin Junge, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation; Jong Chun Park and Ivan Abrahams, president and general secretary of the World Methodist Council and Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary.

ment confirming the WCRC’s association with the joint declaration.

“Today we are not only signing a statement, we are building a church together,” said the Rev. Najla Kassab from Lebanon in her sermon at the service in the *Stadtkirche*, where Luther used to preach.

The ceremony took place in the year marking the 500th anniversary of Luther’s denunciation of church corruption in his 95 Theses, an event that helped set in motion the Reformation and centuries of division between Protestants and Catholics.

“The present achievement and commitment are viewed by Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists and Reformed as part of their pursuit of the full communion and common witness to the world which is the will of Christ for all Christians,” said WMC president Jong Chun Park.

Pope Francis, in a message read by Bishop Farrell, described the ceremony as “an eloquent sign of our commitment to walking together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, on a journey from conflict to communion, from division to reconciliation.”

During the service, the LWF and the WCRC also signed a “Wittenberg Witness” pledging to strengthen cooperation and joint action.

“We commit ourselves to redouble our common efforts to embody our unity, together resisting the forces of injustice and exclusion,” said Martin Junge, LWF general secretary.

At the service there were prayers of repentance and lamentation for past divisions and wrongs, and commitments to work for unity and justice. ●

—Stephen Brown

El Presidente de la CMIR insta a la voz profética para promover la renovación y la transformación mundial

Un mundo en crisis necesita un compromiso renovado con la justicia y la paz, dijo el presidente de la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas (CMIR), el Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, a los delegados y delegadas que asisten a la asamblea mundial de la CMIR en Leipzig, Alemania.

“Hoy vivimos en un mundo en el que los ricos se hacen cada vez más ricos y los pobres cada vez más pobres”, dijo en su informe presentado el día de apertura de la Asamblea General, que se celebra del 29 de junio al 7 de julio de la CMIR y que reúne a unos 1000 participantes en esta ciudad de Alemania oriental.

“La CMIR está llamada a estar junto a los pobres”, dijo Pillay en el informe. “Esta es una base esencial para nuestra renovación y transformación”, dijo, haciendo referencia al tema de la reunión de nueve días, “Dios de Vida, renuévanos y transfórmanos”.

Pillay destacó desafíos como la pobreza, la trata de personas, el racismo, las castas y las divisiones étnicas, las respuestas a los refugiados y la migración, la violencia religiosa y el cambio climático.

“A la luz de las experiencias en el mundo de hoy, la CMIR debe ejercer una voz profética como la que hizo al oponerse al apartheid en Sudáfrica”, subrayó Pillay, un teólogo de la Iglesia Presbiteriana Unida en Sudáfrica

Hace cinco siglos, reformadores protestantes como Martín Lutero en Alemania, Juan Calvino en Ginebra y Ulrich Zwinglio en Zúrich, Suiza, denunciaron la corrupción y los fracasos en la iglesia de su tiempo, dijo Pillay.

No pretendían fundar una nueva iglesia, continuó, sino reformar a toda la iglesia, que no creían que hiciera frente a la corrupción financiera, la inmoralidad sexual y el poder político.

“Ahora, quinientos años después, el llamado a la renovación y la transformación se ha hecho aún mayor a medida que nos ocupamos de los complejos desafíos de un mundo que sufre y de una iglesia dividida que lucha”, declaró.

Al mismo tiempo, la diversidad teológica y las cuestiones éticas siguen dividiendo a los cristianos reformados, advirtió el presidente de la CMIR.

“Incluso en la Familia Reformada (...) la sexualidad humana y la ordenación de mujeres continúa dividiéndonos”, dijo Pillay a los delegados.

Una consulta que tendrá lugar después de la Asamblea General explorará cómo preservar la unidad y la justicia en tanto la CMIR enfrenta los retos de la sexualidad humana, dijo Pillay.

Sobre el reconocimiento y la aceptación de las mujeres en el liderazgo de la iglesia, se presentará una “Declaración de Fe sobre la Ordenación de la Mujer” en la reunión de Leipzig.

“Es un camino por el que debemos viajar si queremos permanecer fieles a lo que creemos como Comunión”, dijo Pillay, aunque algunas iglesias miembro se opusieron a la ordenación de mujeres.

La reunión de la CMIR se celebra en el año que conmemora el quincuagésimo aniversario de las 95 tesis de Lutero que denuncian la corrupción de la iglesia, lo que llevó a una ruptura con la Iglesia Católica Romana y el desarrollo de iglesias protestantes separadas.

El 5 de julio, los delegados de la CMIR viajarán a Wittenberg, a unos 72 kilómetros de Leipzig, donde Lutero publicó sus 95 tesis el 31 de octubre de 1517.

Allí, la CMIR celebrará un servicio ecuménico de adoración y firmará un acuerdo de asociación con la Declaración Conjunta sobre la Doctrina de la Justificación de 1999 entre la Federación Luterana Mundial y la Iglesia Católica Romana, una cuestión divisoria durante la Reforma del siglo XVI.

La CMIR también firmará un acuerdo con la FLM conocida como “Testimonio de Wittenberg” para fortalecer la cooperación entre las dos organizaciones protestantes del mundo.

“Wittenberg, creemos, es un lugar importante para este evento porque representa simbólicamente la ruptura de la unidad de la iglesia cristiana en el siglo XVI”, dijo Pillay en su informe. “Wittenberg ahora puede ser el símbolo de la renovación de la iglesia y la esperanza de que la división de la iglesia pueda ser sanada”. ●

—Stephen Brown



Presidente Jerry Pillay

La CMER favorise le dialogue entre la Corée du Nord et du Sud

Des délégations sud et nord-coréennes ont pu se rencontrer lors de l'Assemblée générale de la Communion mondiale d'Eglises réformées, à Leipzig. Ces réunions s'inscrivent dans un processus de dialogue pour la paix et la réunification.

«La situation coréenne est extrêmement critique. Nous devons trouver des solutions et avancer ensemble vers l'unification», a déclaré Yueh-wen Lu, membre de l'Eglise presbytérienne de Taïwan, lors de la plénière sur la Corée, à Leipzig. Mardi 4 juillet, dans le cadre de l'Assemblée générale de la Communion mondiale d'Eglises réformées (CMER), des délégués nord et sud-coréens ainsi que des spécialistes de l'Asie se sont penchés sur la situation actuelle de ce pays promouvant le dialogue pacifique.

«Le cycle de confrontation avec les Etats-Unis est de plus en plus hostile. Nous sommes dans une situation dramatique. De plus, les sanctions envers la Corée du Nord sont sans précédent», s'est alarmé Ri Jongho, un délégué nord-coréen de la Fédération chrétienne coréenne (Korean Christian Federation KCF) qui a exprimé sa crainte d'une guerre nucléaire. «L'état doit protéger la vie de ses citoyens. Mais en tant que chrétiens, nous ne pouvons que dire un «non» inconditionnel aux armes nucléaires», a relevé Paul Oppenheim faisant référence à la Déclaration signée par les Eglises protestantes allemandes en 1982. Cet ancien responsable des relations avec les Eglises d'Asie de l'Eglise protestante allemande (EKD) a souligné l'importance de créer un climat de confiance entre les deux Corées.

Un rêve d'unité

«La division de la Corée après la guerre a été le pire compromis que les Etats-Unis et l'Union soviétique aient pu trouver. Cela a engendré une situation ignoble. Nous vivons dans un stress post-traumatique perpétuel depuis l'armistice», a constaté le pasteur Lee Hongjung de l'Eglise presbytérienne de Corée du Sud. «Mais cette division est le point oméga pour une transformation vers la réconciliation. Nous devons rêver: un jour, les Coréens seront réunis. Un jour, les enfants du Nord et du Sud grandiront ensemble dans un monde sans armes nucléaires», a espéré le pasteur.

«En Allemagne, nous connaissons tous vos craintes. Il y a trente ans, nous étions encore séparés. Nous sommes prêts à vous accompagner vers une coexistence possible. Les plaies de la guerre de Corée n'ont pas encore cicatrisé, mais je suis convaincu que la Communion mondiale peut vous aider à les guérir et réconcilier les chrétiens de deux côtés du pays. C'est notre devoir de favoriser cette réconciliation», a expliqué Lutz Drescher du Forum œcuménique pour la Corée.



Les Coréens du Nord et du Sud partagent la communion.

L'urgence de trouver la paix

Précédemment, le lundi 3 juillet, les délégations du Nord et du Sud se sont réunies pour un culte suivi d'un dîner. Lors de cette rencontre, le pasteur de la KFC, Kang Myong Chol, a souligné «l'urgence d'assurer une véritable paix sur la péninsule coréenne». «Le monde actuel montre que la paix ne vient jamais par elle-même. En tant que chrétiens, nous devons exprimer, concrètement et de façon continue, le désir de paix du Seigneur en brandissant encore plus haut la Croix de la justice», a affirmé le pasteur qui a précisé que pendant des siècles la Corée avait vécu en harmonie, sans jamais envahir d'autres pays ou violer les intérêts de qui que ce soit. A la fin du culte, le pasteur Bohyug Suh, professeur à l'Université de Séoul, a également présenté un traité de paix, établi en 2013 par le Conseil national des Eglises de Corée du Sud (NCCCK). Une pétition a été lancée pour soutenir ce traité dans l'espoir d'aboutir à des négociations de paix.

Depuis les années 1980, la CMER qui rassemble 233 Eglises venant de plus de 100 pays entretient des contacts avec la KCF, une organisation officielle proche du gouvernement nord-coréen qui organise des cultes protestants autorisés. En septembre 2016, une délégation de la CMER s'est rendue en Corée du Nord pour poursuivre le travail de paix et de réconciliation ainsi que pour apporter de l'aide humanitaire. ●

—Laurence Villos

Ferguson casts vision for Communion

In his report to the WCRC General Council, General Secretary Chris Ferguson outlined a new vision for the future, even as he noted the challenges the Communion has taken on since the 2010 Uniting General Council—and those it is still facing.

During the presentation of his report to the Council in Leipzig, on Friday, June 30, Ferguson looked back on several events that occurred these last seven years and pointed to various paths for the future. “After overcoming a financial crisis, we have recovered stability,” said Ferguson.

In 2014, the WCRC moved its global offices from Geneva to Hannover, Germany. “The Executive Committee acted resolutely and decisively to ensure that the WCRC could survive financially, and the tough reality that we could no longer sustain offices and staff salaries in one of the most expensive cities in the world. To leave the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva was wrenching. The move to Hannover was made possible by the extraordinary generosity and vision of the Reformed Alliance in Germany and the support of German member churches. Their vision and commitment have been at the base of the successful transition to Hannover,” he said.

Having overcome this financial crisis, the WCRC stated new objectives for the future. Gathered in Havana, Cuba, the Executive adopted revisions to its strategic plan to focus on key goals. The plan identified key five key directions: mission, communion, justice, theology and ecumenical engagement. “In regards

to mission, we developed programmes to accompany members of our family in the context of violence and peacebuilding,” he said.

And as a church communion that requires constant work, the sexuality issue is never far away. “Human sex-



General Secretary Chris Ferguson

uality has been long identified as both a church-dividing and a communion-dividing issue,” he said. “The purpose is not to come to a common position on human sexuality but to strengthen our understanding of communion—taking away the power of our differences to divide us while honouring the imperative of justice.” A Consultation on Communion and Human Sexuality will be convened on this issue in November.

As for the question of justice, the WCRC has focused on equality

between women and men. “Gender justice is not limited to women’s ordination. Our goal is to reach 50% of female delegates at the General Council,” said Ferguson.

Another important theme attracting attention especially in this year noting the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, is ecumenical engagement. “We will celebrate our association to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justice (JDDJ) together with ecumenical partners in the context of this Council during our day in Wittenberg on July 5. This is an important signal of our commitment to Christian unity,” said Ferguson. The JDDJ, signed both by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, states that the churches share “a single understanding of justification by the grace of God through faith in Christ.”

More widely, Ferguson called for the transformation of the whole society: “As a World Communion we are all aware that our entire world—people and planet—are in a crisis that engulfs our life together in all its dimensions; politically, economically, socially, culturally, religiously, ecologically, militarily and gender equality with massive threats to life, sustainability and well-being. We must fight against all kinds of violence”—notably by giving a voice to the poor, by engaging with young people and children while deepening the understanding of the intersections between theology and justice, peace and reconciliation. ●

—*Laurence Villos*

„Lebendiger Gott“ gegen Tod und Zerstörung – Jürgen Moltmann vor der Generalversammlung der Reformierten Kirchen

Ohne Zukunftsvision werden neue wissenschaftliche und technologische Möglichkeiten für Tod und Zerstörung der Menschheit missbraucht, so der deutsche Theologe Jürgen Moltmann vor der Generalversammlung der Reformierten Kirchen.

„Fülle des Lebens‘ heißt die Zukunftsvision, die weit über das Mögliche hier hinausreicht – bis ins ewige Leben“, erklärte Moltmann den Delegierten der Weltgemeinschaft der Reformierten Kirchen (WGRK), die sich vom 29. Juni bis 7. Juli in Leipzig treffen.

Beinahe 50 Jahre nachdem Moltmann zum ersten Mal bei einer Generalversammlung des Reformierten Weltbundes – Vorgänger der WGRK – in Nairobi, Kenia im Jahr 1970 gesprochen hatte, legte er in Leipzig sein Vertrauen auf den „lebendigen Gott“ dar, der vor den Fratzen der „Götter des Todes“ Leben hervorbringt und angesichts des Atheismus Freude schafft. Als Vision der Zukunft bietet er die Fülle des Lebens.

„Jeder Mensch, der dem lebendigen Gott vertraut, sieht in der Welt nicht nur die Realität“, meinte Moltmann. „Realisten haben diese Sichtweise und sie kommen immer zu spät. Jeder, der der Zukunft vertraut, sieht die Welt gemäß ihren Möglichkeiten.“

Als Beispiel für die „Götter des Todes“ nannte Moltmann Rassismus, Krieg, Nationalismus, Kapitalismus, der Reichtum verspricht und Armut schafft, und den Terror von unten, von den „suizidalen Massenmördern“, motiviert durch eine „Religion des Todes“.

Moltmann, heute 91 Jahre, wurde zunächst als reformierter Theologe 1964 mit seiner bahnbrechenden Veröffentlichung *Theologie der Hoffnung* bekannt. Hier ging es um Hoffnung für die noch nicht erreichte Zukunft, die im Lichte der Verheißungen Gottes zu stets neuen Impulsen für Gerechtigkeit, Freiheit und Menschlichkeit in der heutigen Welt führt.

Seither beschäftigt er sich in seinen theologischen Abhandlungen u.a. mit Fragen der Schöpfung und Ökologie, Befreiung und feministischen Theologie und dem Wirken des Heiligen Geistes.

„Der Schrei nach Gerechtigkeit kommt immer zu spät, wenn durch Gewalt und Unrecht das Leben von gefährdeten Menschen unerträglich wird; aber er muss kommen“, stellte Moltmann fest, der in Leipzig vom Generalsekretär der WGRK Chris Ferguson für seinen lebenslangen Beitrag zur reformierten Theologie geehrt wurde.

„Deshalb werden wir zu Suchern nach Möglichkeiten für Leben und Gerechtigkeit und wir werden die zu erkennenden Optionen für Tod und Vernichtung vermeiden“, betonte Moltmann in seiner Rede, in der er die



Jürgen Moltmann

zunehmende Ungleichheit innerhalb von Gesellschaften anprangerte.

„Alle Völker leiden heute an sozialer Verarmung und schreien nach sozialer Gerechtigkeit“, sagte Moltmann. Demokratie basiert nicht nur auf der Freiheit der Staatsbürger, so Moltmann, sondern auch auf ihrer Gleichheit.

„Die demokratische Idee der Gleichheit ist unvereinbar mit einem Wirtschaftssystem, das noch größere Ungleichheit innerhalb der Völker schafft“, fuhr er fort.

Er lobte die WGRK für das Accra-Bekenntnis von 2004, das zu einer Glaubensverpflichtung angesichts der wirtschaftlichen Ungerechtigkeit und ökologischen Zerstörung aufrief.

In dieser Erklärung „tritt dem ‘Gott des Kapitalismus‘ das Bekenntnis zum lebendigen Gott entgegen“, sagte Moltmann, „und der Ruf nach Gerechtigkeit für die Armen und die Erde ergeht weltweit und zielt auf die wirtschaftliche und finanzielle ‚Globalisierung‘.“

Trotzdem warnte er, dass die Sorge um die Opfer der Ungerechtigkeit im Zentrum der reformierten Theologie fehle. „Wir beten ‚vergib uns unsere Schuld‘, aber wo sind die Opfer unserer sündhaften Taten?“ fragte Moltmann und betonte: „An erster Stelle steht nicht die Reue der Täter, sondern der Schmerz der Opfer.“

„Gottes Gerechtigkeit ist keine Gerechtigkeit, die nur Gut und Böse definiert“, stellt Moltmann fest. „Sie ist eine kreative Gerechtigkeit, die Recht schafft. Für die Opfer ist sie eine Gerechtigkeit, die ihnen Recht bringt. Für die Übeltäter ist sie eine Gerechtigkeit, die das Recht wieder einsetzt und Dinge ins Recht rückt.“ ●

—Stephen Brown

Incoming President Najla Kassab speaks of gender equality and justice

“Here I stand, a Middle Eastern woman in the Pulpit of Luther.” So began the sermon delivered by Rev. Najla Kassab at the General Council worship service in Wittenberg on July 5. Now Kassab is poised to stand at the forefront of the WCRC as its president.”

Kassab has a B.A. in Christian Education from the Near East School of Theology and a Masters of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary. Her career has revolved around Christian education at the synod level and, through conferences and workshops, she has encouraged women in ministry for 24 years. The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon offered Kassab a preaching license in 1993 and, in March 2017, awarded her full pastoral ordination. Kassab has served as a member of the WCRC Executive Committee since 2010. She also hosted the 2015 Executive Committee meeting in Lebanon.

Having spent much of her career encouraging women to enter the ministry of the church, Kassab felt compelled to accept the nomination for president when it was suggested to her at the General Council in Leipzig. It’s a fight that she believes has taken far too long. “We cannot think that a bird can fly with only one wing.”

Standing in Martin Luther’s pulpit to deliver the sermon at Wittenberg’s *Stadtkirche* gave Kassab an immediate sense of inspiration and empowerment. “This was where Luther first preached,” she said. “It was the perfect place to speak of women’s ordination.”

Just as Martin Luther admonished the 16th century church for failing to live up to biblical teaching, Kassab believes she has been placed in this position at this time to insist the modern church take seriously its responsibilities when it comes to equality and justice.



Najla Kassab delivers her sermon in the Stadtkirche, Wittenberg.

“Martin Luther is a symbol of speaking up,” said Kassab. “To speak your mind in freedom, that is essential. This is why I said, ‘This could have been Martin Luther’s 96th question to the church. Not why is there a woman in this pulpit, but why did it take so long?’ This is not just a struggle of equality,” said Kassab. “This is a struggle of justice.”

But Kassab, who is a native of Lebanon, believes the most important qualification for her presidency of the WCRC may be her nationality.

“The WCRC talks a lot about justice,” Kassab said. “I come from the Middle East and let me tell you, I know what injustice looks like.”

Kassab’s work frequently takes her to Syria. It’s a calling that carries with it a fair degree of personal danger. But Kassab feels strongly that the Christian church as a whole and the WCRC specifically must assume that risk.

“At times I have to be present to affirm, ‘I am one of you.’ We as a church have to be physically present in places where there is suffering. We

have to be present where it aches if we’re going to talk about justice,” she said.

Practically speaking, issues of gender equality and justice will be carried out locally, said the incoming president. Likewise, affirming and celebrating the WCRC’s diversity will play out in local synods. For this reason, Kassab plans to look for ways to strengthen the work done within the WCRC’s regions.

Ultimately, Kassab believes that change will come over time. And, if the WCRC is willing to engage in the work—and engage all of its leaders, both male and female—justice is possible.

“Change is not about documents,” she said. “It requires physical presence. And if we don’t want to be present, well, we should just stop talking about justice.”

As long as she serves as WCRC president, Najla Kassab has every intention of continuing to speak up. ●

—Amy Eckert

Une pasteure Libanaise elue presidente



Membres du Conseil Exécutif nouvellement élus sur le podium de l'Assemblée Générale.

La pasteure Najla Kassab, du Synode évangélique national de Syrie et du Liban (SENSL), a été élue présidente de la Communion mondiale d'Églises réformées (CMER).

« Grâce à son expérience et à ses nombreux talents, les intuitions, les idées, la force spirituelle, le charme de Najla font qu'elle est exactement la personne qui peut nous pousser à aller de l'avant » a dit Alison McDonald, modératrice du comité des désignations qui présentait à l'Assemblée générale une liste de candidatures pour le Comité exécutif.

Les élections ont eu lieu le 7 juillet, dernier jour de l'Assemblée qui était réunie depuis le 29 juin à Leipzig, ville de l'est de l'Allemagne. Sur les 22 membres du nouveau Comité exécutif, 10 sont des hommes, 12 sont des femmes, il y a 15 pasteurs et 7 laïcs. Cinq membres de l'exécutif sont de jeunes adultes de moins de 30 ans, dont l'un des vice-présidents.

Najla Kassab, 52 ans, est membre du Comité exécutif de la CMER depuis 2010. Directrice du Département d'éducation chrétienne du SENSL, elle a été la première femme autorisée à prêcher dans son Église et, en mars 2017, la deuxième à recevoir l'ordination. Elle a une licence en éducation chrétienne obtenue à Near East School of Theology, et une maîtrise en théologie du Séminaire de Princeton, aux États-Unis, en 1990.

« Je me bats depuis 1993 pour l'ordination des femmes au Moyen-Orient et je rends grâce à Dieu que deux femmes aient été ordonnées pasteurs il y a tout juste deux mois dans notre région » a déclaré Najla Kassab

lors d'une conférence de presse, après son élection. « Comme je l'ai dit, je suis pour des droits égaux pour les femmes, pour qu'elles puissent pleinement exercer leurs talents dans la vie de l'Église et pour que l'Église se développe grâce aux dons des femmes. »

Parmi ses priorités figurent le renforcement des régions de la CMER et l'appui aux jeunes. « Le moment est venu de les entendre, dit-elle, de lutter avec eux, d'écouter ce qu'ils peuvent apporter à la vie de l'Église. »

Elle remarque que, sur certaines questions, les Églises de la CMER ont des points de vue différents. « Ce qui compte, c'est de s'asseoir autour d'une table et de s'écouter les uns les autres dans un esprit de discernement et de dialogue, guidés par l'Esprit saint. »

Elle insiste sur l'importance de l'œcuménisme dans la vie de la CMER. « En tant que Réformés, nous ne pouvons pas survivre en dehors de l'œcuménisme, dit-elle. Ce qu'il s'est passé à Wittenberg constitue une déclaration œcuménique forte de la part des Églises. »

Les autres vice-présidents élus par l'Assemblée générale sont : le pasteur Samuel Ayete-Nyampong (Ghana), la pasteure Lisa Vander Wal (États-Unis), la pasteure Sylvana Maria Apituley (Indonésie) et Raissa Vieira Brasil (Brésil).

Samuel Ayete-Nyampong est secrétaire général de l'Assemblée de l'Église presbytérienne du Ghana depuis 2012. Auparavant, il était en charge des relations internationales et œcuméniques et du partenariat de son Église en qualité de directeur des relations œcuméniques et sociales.

Lisa Vander Wal est actuellement au service de l'Église réformée de Lisha's Hill, à Colonie (New York). Elle a été présidente du Synode général de l'Église réformée en Amérique et modératrice de la commission pour l'unité chrétienne dans son Église. Elle préside le comité directeur du CANAAC (Conseil de la région Caraïbe et Amérique du Nord de la CMER). Elle fait partie du Comité exécutif depuis 2010.

Sylvana Maria Apituley, de la Gereja Protestant Indonesia Bagian Barat, est actuellement conseillère principale au bureau exécutif du Président de la République d'Indonésie, elle a également travaillé comme conseillère spéciale au ministère des droits des femmes et de la protection de l'enfance, ainsi que comme directrice exécutive de la conférence indonésienne sur la religion pour la paix. Elle a été enseignante et assistante au Séminaire de théologie de Jakarta depuis 1997.

Raissa Brasil, de l'Église presbytérienne unie du Brésil, est avocate, diplômée de l'université fédérale de Minas Gerais. Elle est très engagée auprès des ados et des jeunes adultes de son Église, localement et au niveau national. Actuellement, elle est vice-modératrice pour la jeunesse dans son Église et a été déléguée en 2016 à l'Assemblée générale d'AIPRAL (Alliance d'Églises presbytériennes et réformées en Amérique latine).

Johann Weusmann, délégué de l'Alliance réformée (Allemagne), a été réélu pour un second mandat comme

Sidang Raya menyetujui pernyataan tentang penahbisan perempuan

Deklarasi Iman tentang Penahbisan Perempuan” telah diterima oleh WCRC dalam Sidang Raya pada Senin, 3 Juli 2017, di Leipzig.

“Kita telah mencapai suatu konsensus,” demikian ungkapan Jerry Pillay, presiden WCRC. Pada sesi pembuatan keputusan tentang keadilan gender, para delegasi menerima “Deklarasi Iman tentang Penahbisan Perempuan.”

Sebelum ini, beberapa kelompok diskusi telah diadakan selama proses penilikan Sidang. “Proposal atas penahbisan perempuan dan pembuatan kebijakan gender serta

implementasinya mendapatkan dukungan yang sangat kuat dari para delegasi,” kata Lisa Vander Wal, seorang anggota Komite Eksekutif WCRC, yang menyampaikan kesimpulan akhir dari berbagai komentar kelompok-kelompok penilikan.

Stephen Kendall dari Gereja Presbiterian Kanada menyatakan, “Saya merasa gembira karena dapat menyetujui pernyataan ini. Saya hadir dalam Sidang Raya Penyatuan di Grands Rapids pada 2010, dan dalam pertemuan tersebut kami memutuskan untuk benar-benar mempromosikan penahbisan perempuan.”

Meskipun demikian, beberapa anggota peserta mengangkat kartu konsensus berwarna biru yang mengindikasikan bahwa mereka tidak sepenuhnya gembira atas proposal ini. “Kami mencatat ketidaksetujuan kalian,” kata presiden, sambil menambahkan bahwa para delegasi yang tidak mendukung deklarasi ini dapat mengekspresikan penolakan mereka agar dimasukkan dalam Notulen Persidangan.

Persetujuan atas deklarasi ini memberikan kuasa pada langkah berikutnya dalam mewujudkan kesetaraan antara perempuan dan laki-laki di dalam

WCRC. Akan tetapi, “keadilan gender tidak terbatas pada penahbisan perempuan,” tegas Chris Ferguson, sekretaris umum WCRC, selama presentasi laporannya. Jalan bagi pekerjaan selanjutnya terkait kesetaraan gender telah terbuka dan WCRC bertekad untuk terlibat dalam suatu proses pendampingan bagi gereja-gereja anggotanya. ●

—*Laurence Villos*

Lombard Prize awarded to New Zealand’s Jordan Redding

Jordan Redding, an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and a doctoral student from Dunedin, New Zealand, has been named the winner of the 2017 Lombard Prize.

In association with Lombard, Odier & Cie, Bankers of Geneva, Switzerland, the WCRC called for entries in the essay competition in January, 2017. The competition was intended to challenge young theologians no older than age 30 to write on any aspect of the WCRC’s 2017 General Council theme: Living God, renew and transform us. Qualifying essays were to illustrate a familiarity with the Reformed tradition and theology and to demonstrate both theological imagination and a willingness to relate theology to modern-day challenges to witness and mission in the church and the world.

Redding’s essay, titled “Living God, Renew and Transform Us:



Jordan Redding

Awakening to God’s Reality,” related to the notion of transformative prayer. The piece was based on a passage from John 3 where Nicodemus approaches Christ and acknowledges his divinity. Jesus responds by commanding Nicodemus to be born again.

“Nicodemus came to Jesus on his own terms,” said Redding, “and Christ turned things around. Prayer is not about us coming to God

alone, but rather about God’s awakening us to transformation and renewal.” Redding based his essay in part on his doctoral research subject, the 19th-century Swiss Protestant theologian Eduard Thurneysen.

Redding’s essay was judged the winner by a panel of Reformed theologians. His prize includes publication of his essay in an upcoming issue of *Reformed World*, the official theological journal of the WCRC. Redding also received an all-expenses-paid trip to the 2017 General Council meeting in Leipzig.

The trip to Germany has double value to Redding. Although he greatly appreciates the opportunity to meet and discern with Reformed Church representatives from around the world, his time in Europe will also allow him the chance to conduct research in Basel, where Thurneysen pastored and served as a theological professor. ●

—*Amy Eckert*

Council called to strengthen communion

In his address on “Strengthening Communion” to the 2017 General Council, Rev. Dr. Collin Cowan drew out the critical question of whether the Communion’s strength was the end in itself, or if strength was the means for capacity for transformative praxis to respond to discerning and doing God’s mission.

“Embedded in the very identity of the Reformed community is the understanding that communion is both the result and the doing of peace and that there can be no peace without justice,” said Cowan, general secretary of the Council for World Mission (CWM), after he brought greetings and affirmed WCRC’s partnership with CWM.

The call to communion is a call for unity as a life-giving and life-affirming community, equipped and energized to join Jesus in his radical love for the world. This agape takes Christians into the trenches of pain and loneliness to which social untouchables are relegated, to cross barriers of arrogance and prejudice, and to challenge ideologies of supremacy.

Communion defined by this love knows that its *raison d’être* is to partner with God in God’s work of renewal, transformation, healing and hope, and congregations must offer authentic witness and service because praxis authenticates communion.

Cowan highlighted that unless Christians are prepared to name the mission context and confront divisive, death-dealing ideologies, they run the risk of playing the usual ecumenical politics, making a mockery of the meaning of communion.

Communion is counter-empire, because “communion exposes empire; communion expresses a theological conviction that in God’s *oikos* there is a place for all, whilst empire feathers the powerful at the expense of the majority. Empire leaves behind a trail of social dislocation, a sense of powerlessness, and vulnerabilities it creates. Communion is based on relationships of integrity and trust; spiritualities of hospitality and generosity of spirit; and a commitment to the journey of healing and hope.”

Quoting Jürgen Moltmann’s earlier presentation where he suggested that “the ecumenical movement is missing the reformation agenda,” Cowan spoke about how this agenda is stymied by a preference for maintaining the sta-

tus quo, believing that Christians are doing things right, and no system overhaul is needed.

The call to communion is a call to discipleship; meaning Christianity must be prepared to stand with Jesus of Nazareth, who confronted the power of the day with a radical message and lifestyle of an alternative way of being and doing.

“As a Communion, we are the embodiment of the alternative; this means that we must be prepared to model the alternative by creating safe spaces and sanctuaries of healing and hope for all. We are a Communion because we are disciples of Jesus Christ, called to a communitarian lifestyle, people who embrace and embody values of justice in relationships, mutuality, equality and interdependence, unity in diversity and generosity of spirit,” he said.

The call to communion is a call to transformative praxis, to be “salt of the earth,” beacons of hope and stewards of peace.

Roderick Hewitt, president of United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, in framing the topic

within the context of contemporary global challenges in the concept paper, encouraged Reformed Christians to “promote interpretation of Scripture inspired by the Reformed tradition that affirms life for all” and bear witness to communion that is “with others.”

“The essence of communion is not a private table. It is at this table that we are welcomed and received, a table that moves boundaries, a table that invites us to belong, believe, beckon the faces of radical discipleship. It is that journey of being Jesus’ disciples that pushes us to social, political and economic engagement in an open community,” Hewitt explained.

He also highlighted that missional leadership is crucial for authentic communion, since “Communion necessitates modeling new and inclusive forms of leadership based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.” Many practitioners who promote self-importance and power are seen as “betrayers” of the gospel, whereas leaders with integrity seek “authentic spirituality that fosters redemption and rediscovering what it means to be human,” thus embodying the practical expression of “being the gospel” and resulting in transformative discipleship. ●

—Hui Jun Chia



CWM General Secretary Collin Cowan

Soñamos con un mundo de justicia

El Domingo 2 de Julio se realizó una celebración especial en la Catedral Evangélica de Berlín. El servicio de adoración reunió a todos los participantes de la 26° Asamblea General de CMIR, junto a autoridades locales y la congregación berlinense, que recibió a la numerosa delegación en el monumental edificio, ubicado en el centro de la capital alemana.

“Como seguidores y seguidoras de Jesucristo recibimos el llamado a estar con las personas que sufren y buscar justicia para todos y todas”, dijo la Obispo local Petra Bosse-Huber al comenzar la liturgia, luego de una procesión inicial, con referentes jóvenes de las diferentes regiones que componen la Comunión. Los jóvenes dieron testimonio sobre las situaciones de injusticia que se buscan afrontar con el trabajo diaconico: situación de los refugiados en Grecia, la violencia basada en la religión en Indonesia, la violencia de género y hacia niñas y niños en el Caribe. “Juntas y juntos miramos este mundo roto, separado por antiguas fronteras y nuevos muros, desgarrado por la codicia, la ignorancia, la violencia.”

El mensaje central lo realizó el Secretario General de CMIR Rev. Christopher Ferguson, destacando la audacia profética de Jesús al anunciar el año de gracia del Señor: hablaba a su contexto social, político económico. “La misión de Dios está dirigida a los pobres, los desa-

mparados. Dios es anunciado como Dios de paz, justicia y reconciliación

“La justicia es una cuestión de fe”, agregó. “En la Confesión de Accra, la familia reformada proclamó: Creemos que Dios nos llama a ponernos del lado de las víctimas de la injusticia. Sabemos qué es lo que el Señor pide de nosotros: ser artífices de la justicia, amar la misericordia y transitar los caminos de Dios. El Evangelio debe entonces hacerse plenamente vigente como la autoridad que habla en contra de la opresión de la pobreza”

La ceremonia fue transmitida en directo por canales alemanes, remarcando su carácter ecuménico e internacional. Esto se reflejó en la variedad musical que acompañó la liturgia: un coro femenino de gospel, un ensamble de vientos y el majestuoso órgano de la Catedral de Berlín acompañaron a los congregados que cantaron en inglés, alemán, francés, español, indonesio y coreano.

Al finalizar el culto, los participantes a la Asamblea se dirigieron al cercano Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, donde recibieron la bienvenida de la Ministra de Desarrollo y Cooperación Internacional, Dra. Gerd Müller, junto al mensaje del Presidente de CMIR Rev. Jerry Pillay. ●

—*Josué Charbonnier Dalmás*

Leipziger Oberbürgermeister empfängt Christen aus über hundert Ländern

Willkommen an einem Ort der Reformation“, so begrüßte Oberbürgermeister Burkhard Jung die rund 1.000 Delegierten der Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen im Leipziger Rathaus. Jung spielte damit auf die sogenannte „Leipziger Disputation“ aus dem Jahr 1519 an, bei der sich Martin Luthers Konflikt mit der römisch-katholischen Kirche noch einmal deutlich verschärfte. Der Oberbürgermeister erinnerte ebenso an die friedliche Revolution von 1989. „Ich danke den Menschen, die damals hier gebetet haben und auf die Straße gegangen sind. Nur so ist es möglich, dass wir uns hier heute treffen.“

Christen evangelisch-reformierter Prägung aus über hundert Ländern

tagen noch bis zum 7. Juli in Leipzig zur Generalversammlung, die alle sieben Jahre stattfindet. Jung betonte, er sei stolz, dass für das internationale Treffen diesmal Leipzig als Tagungsort gewählt wurde: „Das passt einfach. Wir haben hier eine große Tradition, was Konferenzen angeht. Und wir begrüßen gern Menschen aus allen Kontinenten.“

Er verwies auf die großen Söhne der Stadt, etwa Johann-Sebastian Bach oder Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Auch hob er die Bedeutung der Universität Leipzig hervor, die schon 1519 zur Disputation einlud.

Für die Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen dankte Präsident Jerry Pillay dem Oberbürgermeister für die

Gastfreundschaft. Im Anschluss an den Empfang wurde die Ausstellung „Global Players for God and World“ eröffnet, die ab jetzt sechs Wochen lang in der Wandelhalle des Neuen Rathauses zu sehen sein wird. Geschichten, Dokumente und Bilder zeigen, wie reformierte Christinnen und Christen auch 500 Jahre nach Luther, Calvin und Zwingli an der Erneuerung ihrer Kirche mitarbeiten und sich für eine gerechtere Welt einsetzen. ●

—*Bernd Becker*

Faith has a duty to promote reconciliation, says German president

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier has appealed to the General Council to demonstrate the peacemaking role of faith at a time when religious beliefs are misused to justify violence.

“Now more than ever the Reformed churches must make particular efforts to foster peaceful dialogue and to very consciously underline the power of religion to promote peace and reconciliation,” Steinmeier told the gathering in Leipzig.

“Most importantly,” the German president said, Reformed churches must be “an example of this themselves.”

Steinmeier underlined the importance of the task, “at a time when religion is often misused as a means of isolation and distance, indeed as a pretext for the most brutal acts of violence.”

The German president was speaking at Leipzig’s historic *Nikolaikirche*—St. Nicholas’ Church—following the main welcome service of the Council.

The WCRC president, the Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, recalled in his sermon at the service how in 1989 the *Nikolaikirche* became a focus for a peaceful revolt against communist rule in East Germany.

“On Mondays at 5 pm people gathered for prayer and soon it evolved into thousands of people gathering with lighted candles in peaceful protest against communism,” said Pillay. “This church became a place of hope and freedom.”

In his address to the WCRC gathering, the German president said the 1989 “peaceful revolution” in East Germany might have turned out differently were it not for the prayers for peace at the *Nikolaikirche* and what they inspired on the streets of Leipzig.

“This is where people found the audaciousness to stand up against

oppression and lies. This is where people experienced the freedom that empowers them to stand upright,” said Steinmeier. Such freedom—“religious freedom, freedom of conscience, political freedom and political self-determination”—is perhaps the most wonderful outcome of Reformation faith, he continued.

This made it particularly important, said Steinmeier, to work for freedom in places where censorship, repression and violation of funda-



General Secretary Chris Ferguson greets German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

mental human rights still prevail or are happening again.

“We should also take a stance when people are persecuted because of their faith and convictions,” the German president said. “People of many religions suffer persecution, but Christians in the Middle East are currently particularly severely affected.”

An active member of the Reformed church in Germany, Steinmeier noted how the WCRC was meeting in Germany as the country marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s Reformation.

Luther’s main impact was at first in German-speaking countries, he recalled, and it was primarily through the Reformers Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich and John Calvin in Geneva that the Reformation became a powerful European movement.

“The Reformed churches were a potent international movement from the start,” Steinmeier stated.

The German president welcomed the fact that during its global assem-

bly, the WCRC would be associating itself officially with a key ecumenical statement, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church.

“This is a major step towards ecumenism,” Steinmeier said, at a time when Christian witness becomes ever less credible with Christians divided in different denominations and speaking with such different voices. ●

—Stephen Brown



GIT 2017: A journey of inspiration and renewal from Wuppertal to Leipzig

“Our time in Wuppertal was an absolutely amazing reality of the beauty of God’s diversity—from the thoughtful setting, to the imaginative worship experiences, courses, exposure visits, to the clear and loving model of leadership provided by our lecturers and coordinators,” said Sanya Beharry.

The student minister with the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago echoed the sentiments of many of the 41 students in the Global Institute of Theology (GIT) 2017, an intensive WCRC programme that brings together young theologians and faculty from diverse countries and traditions to live together, teach, learn and do theology in an inter-contextual and ecumenical setting, connecting theology from local to regional and world levels.

Sanya attested to the strong bonds created in the first phase of

GIT 2017 at Wuppertal, and these safe spaces for expressions and gaining fresh perspectives during uncertainties about statements and decisions during the Council at Leipzig—something characteristic of her entire GIT experience.

The theological presentation by Jürgen Moltmann with the responses from three young female theologians, and prayer and communion in language used for inclusion left a deep impression on her; so did participating as a voice in solidarity with vulnerable Caribbean youth during the listening session “Mission in Communion.”

Seeing how a vast majority from different cultures and contexts could be led to reach a consensus largely favourable to most, skills in managing diverse personalities on the floor and during meetings and the realization that “we can differ and still be in communion” were the tip of the iceberg of what Monyane Ntai, an aspiring South African theology student at University of Pretoria had learnt through the GIT Programme.

Mitri Raheb’s Bible study on the Palestine context suggesting that “Jesus Christ must always be seen as an occupied Messiah” and his message of liberation resonated strongly in Monyane. The GIT experience



has changed his world view, as he realized that problems of racial division were not unique to South Africa.

Monyane hopes to take concrete steps such as initiate a process of mutual listening and talking among students of all colours in his university about divisive issues arising from history, supplement the little knowledge on ecological justice in his context with eco-theology and on early education on treatment of women to prevent gender violence.

For Shuba Keerthana, a female ordained presbyter in Karnataka Central Diocese, Church of South India, the academic courses and real-life stories from different contexts enriched her theological understanding and contributed to her personal and ministerial formation by shatter-



ing her stereotypes of gender orientations, challenging her perspectives and inspiring her to “challenge power structures and give heed to subaltern voices.”

“The topics we learnt at Wuppertal were carefully designed to allow us to relate to our contexts... These insights enabled me to contribute in my discernment group and also to journey with the proceedings in the Council,” she added.

Her practical implications include applying hermeneutical tools in theology, sensitizing youth and women in her church to issues around them and encouraging them to relate their faith to the realities through Bible studies and missional activities.

Shawn Harmon, a student at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, felt that the wide-ranging issues raised about the idea of mission has helped him comprehend the global witness of the church and the importance of partnership in mission to understand where the church can engage in justice, evangelism and reconciliation, to participate in local and global missions that work towards fullness of life for all in Jesus Christ especially in areas where the church has been complacent to act in the past.

The nationalities, cultures and languages among participants were diverse, but one overwhelmingly fact was clear: “You won’t be the same theologian when you go back to your home country.” ●

—Hui Jun Chia

Permohonan doa dan dukungan erupsi gunung Sinabung

Gunung Sinabung, gunung berapi aktif di propinsi Sumatera Barat, kembali mengalami erupsi pada akhir Juli, dengan melontarkan abu hingga ketinggian 4,2 km. Sekalipun tidak ada korban jiwa, erupsi ini kembali memaksa penduduk untuk meninggalkan rumah mereka, dan usaha-usaha bantuan yang baru kembali dibutuhkan.

Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP), salah satu anggota World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) yang terus mendampingi dan mendukung para pengungsi, menyerukan permohonan doa dan dukungan dari WCRC dan anggota-anggotanya.

Aktifitas Gunung Sinabung yang berlangsung secara terus menerus dalam beberapa tahun terakhir menyebabkan banyak tantangan bagi penduduk yang tinggal di sekitarnya. Zona merah radius 7 kilometer yang ditetapkan oleh pemerintah menyebabkan lebih dari 3000 keluarga terpaksa meninggalkan rumah mereka, kehilangan mata pencaharian dan berakibat kesulitan ekonomi dan sosial. Anak-anak tidak dapat bersekolah, dan akses kesehatan juga menjadi masalah.

Mari berdoa bersama-sama: Tuhan, sekalipun bumi bergoncang, kami mengetahui bahwa kasih setia-Mu kepada kami tidak akan berubah. Biarkan kami, gereja-Mu, menjadi bukti kehadiran-Mu, khususnya di tengah terjadinya bencana, dengan menyediakan tanggungan yang bekerja tanpa pamrih dan hati yang terbuka untuk semua. Kiranya pekerjaan, kesaksian, dan usaha advokasi kami memberi kelegaan bagi mereka yang membutuhkan. Amin.

WCRC condemns white supremacism in USA

The “largest hate-rally of its kind in decades in the United States” was countered by a determined group of clergy and thousands of other activists the weekend of August 11-13 in Charlottesville, Virginia. One counter-demonstrator was killed and more than a dozen

injured after the demonstration was cancelled by government authorities.

An interfaith service, held on the campus of the University of Virginia in Charlottesville on Friday night, included the participation of Traci Blackmon, executive minister of Justice and Witness for the United Church of Christ, a WCRC member.

“The service...was intended to be a moment of motivation, a moment of prayer, and a moment of encouragement for people who wanted to provide faithful witness of love anticipating today’s march,” said Blackmon said on Saturday.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches condemns the actions and beliefs of the racists, neo-Nazis and white supremacists involved in these incidents. The WCRC joins with and in support of its member churches which are actively involved in countering such evil. The WCRC calls on all to join with us in support and prayer.

Internship applications invited

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is pleased to offer an internship programme for highly qualified young people who are interested in gaining valuable experience working with an international ecumenical organization. The internships run for 12 months in the WCRC offices in Hannover, Germany, beginning each January.

The internship programme is open to English-speaking individuals of WCRC member churches who are aged 30 or younger, including ministers, seminarians in their senior years or Christian professionals with an interest in working for their churches or the ecumenical movement at any level.

The deadline for applications for internships beginning in January 2018 is 15 October 2017. Full details are available on the WCRC website: wcr.ch/leadership-development/internships

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La performance des artistes incarne les fondements de la Confession d'Accra.



Des membres de la CMER créent une représentation théâtrale sur le thème de la justice

Ils sont venus des cinq continents et de onze pays différents, du Brésil et d'Afrique du Sud, du Pakistan et d'Argentine, du Canada et du Ghana. Quinze membres d'Églises réformées, dont aucun n'était acteur professionnel, tous étrangers les uns aux autres. Ils sont arrivés à Berlin avant l'Assemblée générale 2017 de la Communion mondiale d'Églises réformées (CMER). Leur objectif, fabriquer une pièce de théâtre originale pour la jouer à l'Assemblée.

Les artistes devaient prendre en considération les concepts généraux de paix et de justice dans un cadre chrétien. Et aussi s'inspirer de la Confession d'Accra. Mais il n'y avait pas de texte à suivre. La représentation serait uniquement le résultat de la recherche d'idées en groupe et aboutirait à un message unique transmis par le spectacle.

Bárbara Santos, Till Baumann et Christoph Leucht animent des productions de ce genre à Kuringa, un atelier situé à Berlin et spécialisé dans le « Théâtre des Opprimés » (Theater der Unterdrückten). Basé sur une pratique théâtrale née au Brésil, ce Théâtre des Opprimés aide les gens à trouver leur voix et leur style théâtral pour transmettre des sentiments de soumission sociale et, dans la mesure du possible, pour présenter des exigences de changement.

En raison de la taille de la salle occupée par les acteurs et des différences de langues entre eux ainsi qu'avec les membres de l'Assemblée générale formant le public, ce groupe de quinze personnes a rapidement décidé de se limiter au langage corporel et aux accessoires.

Au bout d'une semaine de collaboration et de répétitions, la

représentation finale a eu lieu dans la salle plénière de la Foire de Leipzig. En dehors de chaises de couleur venant des pays des acteurs, les seuls accessoires étaient une vingtaine de boîtes en carton. Les acteurs jouaient un groupe d'autochtones jouissant tranquillement d'une ressource naturelle. Là-dessus, intervient un autre acteur, André Bartlett, d'Afrique du Sud, qui vient tromper les autochtones en leur échangeant leur ressource contre rien d'autre que des sacs de plastique vides. L'escroc utilise ensuite ses assistants pour construire un mur de cartons vides entre lui et ceux et celles qu'il a dépouillés, la représentation se termine lorsque les autochtones scandalisés abattent le mur en criant « Paix ! » et « Justice ! »

Cette représentation collaborative a été une expérience de poids pour

Simone Vishvabharatha, déléguée de Sri Lanka. Elle a été impressionnée par la façon dont un groupe tellement divers, venu de milieux culturels si différents, avec une grande diversité de langues, a pu si rapidement mettre au point un sujet commun sur la justice.

« C'était une véritable communion – dit-elle – dans tous les sens du terme. Voilà la tâche de la CMER. »

Luciano Kovacs, originaire d'Italie, actuellement directeur exécutif de la Fédération des associations chrétiennes d'étudiants à New York, est bien d'accord : « En fait, notre représentation a réussi à saisir en 20 minutes la Confession d'Accra, mieux qu'un discours d'une heure. »

À la suite de cette expérience, il se demande si la CMER ne devrait pas, à l'avenir, consacrer moins de temps à des conférences et mettre à la place plus d'éléments artistiques.

« Nous sommes tellement dans nos têtes, dit M. Kovacs. Mais la souffrance, c'est émotionnel. La souffrance est physique, exactement comme le Jésus ressuscité était une incarnation physique. » ●

—Amy Eckert

Council receives newly commissioned psalm with a standing ovation

Aus *Tiefer Not* (“From Deep Distress”), a new psalm commissioned by the WCRC for the occasion of its 2017 General Council in Leipzig, made its world premiere at the *Nikolaikirche* Tuesday, 4 July. The composition was created by collaborators Geonyong Lee and Cord Meijering and drew a standing ovation at its conclusion.

“This piece was so amazing!” exclaimed delegate Clariana Lia Teixeira from Brazil. “I just loved it.”

The new score incorporated music by composers Heinrich Schütz, Felix Mendelssohn and Leonard Bernstein and traditional Korean folk music. Its text comprised traditional psalms as well as portions of tragic literature from around the world:

Grimmelshausen from 17th century Europe, Solomon Northrup from 19th century America, Nam Ju Kim from 20th century Asia and Marc-Antoine Vumilia Muhindo from Congo.

Instrumentation included a pipe organ, a full orchestra, flute, drums and a guitar. Mezzosoprano Elisabeth Holmer played a central role in the performance of the sacred work, and the Reformed Church of Leipzig contributed a good deal. The church's choir sang throughout much of the work, and its Cantor Christiana Bräutigam directed the piece.

Each movement of “Aus Tiefer Not” alternated between deep lament and the response of a hopeful psalm. The work's tragic movements sounded discord: the simulated gunshots of a snare drum, the eerie, airy voice of a flute and the mournful tones—even shrieks—of Mezzosoprano Holmer. In contrast, the piece's psalm-based movements incorporated the close harmonies of stringed instruments, the soaring, melodic voices of the Reformed Church choir, and biblical promises that “Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy” (Psalm 126).

Teixeira found the interchange between musical movements deeply moving: “The words of tragedy followed with words of joy; the sounds of modern music followed by traditional sacred music; the agonizing words of the world followed by the hopeful words of the psalms. I cannot express how this music reached into my soul.”

When the WCRC decided to commission a new musical work for the 2017 General Council, there was quick consensus that only a psalm would do.

“Psalms express sentiment in an extraordinary way,” said General Council Coordinator Rev. Dr. Hanns Lessing. “They speak bodily of themes that are understandable cross-culturally.” He added that psalms also address both sorrow and hope in a way that seemed especially appropriate for modern times.

The work closed with a “Hallelujah” sung by the choir—and the congregation. It was a dramatic moment in which the members of the Council were invited to add their voices to the hope expressed in the Gospel.

“Of all the moments in this piece,” said Teixeira, “of all the beautiful moments, this is the moment I will take with me: the words, ‘How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!’” (Psalm 131) “Isn't that what this whole conference has been about?” ●

—Amy Eckert



Discernment process relies on group consensus to discover God's will

Over the course of the General Council attendees had many opportunities to hear of discernment. But what is discernment precisely? How does the process help delegates determine God's will for the World Communion of Reformed Churches? And how does the process help to solidify the sense of unity so vital to an organization such as the WCRC?

Gradye Parsons, a now-former Executive Committee member and seconded staff for the Decisions Procedure Team, helped explain how the Council utilized consensus-based decision-making at its meeting.

Before attendees reached Leipzig, proposals on the subjects of theology, justice, gender justice, mission in communion and strengthening communion were drafted and submitted to Council delegates. Proposals ranged from support of the Paris Climate Accord at the upcoming G20 meeting to the Declaration of Faith on the Ordination of Women.

In Germany, "Listening Sessions" further fleshed out the details of the proposals up for consideration. Experts on various topics helped clarify the issues, and Council attendees were offered opportunities to comment on and question the proposals. Once the proposals were fully detailed, Council members divided into 17 "Discernment Groups" to carefully consider each proposal.

In many ways, it is within those small groups that the real work of discernment takes place. "Discernment truly is more about listening than speaking," said Parsons. "It is important to listen to what others are saying. It is important to listen to what God is saying. And it's important to consider your own thoughts with regard to the issue and in light of what you have heard."

Lucy Wambui Waweru, minister of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa serving the Nyeri Church in



central Kenya, valued very much the input that ordinary delegates had on the process within the small groups.

"Discernment Groups include voices from around the world," she said. "The groups also have a mix of older, more seasoned ecumenists as well as younger delegates. And every voice is heard."

Within the Discernment Group session, members typically suggested changes based upon group input. At that point, the edited proposals—from each of the 17 groups—were sent to the "Drafting Team." That team's job was to filter, summarize and generally meld all 17 recommendations into one unified document. That proposal returned to the Council body in a "Decision Session" for further question and comment.

Finally, after what had been days of discussion and prayer on the issues, the Decision Session moderator asked for a show of consensus. Every voting delegate had the opportunity to express their disposition toward a proposal via means of colored cards. Raising an orange card indicated warmth toward the adoption of a proposal. Raising a blue card indicated coolness to the idea.

Annedore Held Venhaus, minister in the Evangelical La Plata

Church in Tres Arroyos, Argentina, really liked the notion of the colored cards. "I like how the cards express a feeling, not a decision," she said. "I feel warm to this idea, I feel cool to it. I found that very interesting."

Waweru agreed. She also appreciated that giving consensus did not mean that a delegate was 100% supportive or opposed to a proposal. Nor did it mean that the delegate envisioned a clear path toward adoption of the new proposal.

"Just because I raise my orange card doesn't mean I know that my home church will accept the proposal," she said, "and it doesn't mean I know how my home church will implement it. My orange card only means that I believe God is calling us to journey in this direction. It's all about a willingness to begin a process."

Any time Council delegates raised their cards, it was possible that the room would be a sea of a single color, orange or blue. Much more likely was a mix of colors. If the blue cards represented a minority of those present in the Decision Session, the moderator could ask the minority for their consent to move forward anyway. And oftentimes the minority group would do just that. Why? Sometimes the minority merely

wanted the opportunity to voice misgivings and, having done so, felt ready to move on. Sometimes the minority group recognized the voice of God in the voices of many.

“Consensus does not equal unanimity,” said Parsons.

Other results of a split showing of orange and blue cards could be a revision of the proposal, taking the dissenters’ concerns into account.

The proposal could also be returned to the Executive Committee for further work.

“In a parliamentary system, there is only a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote,” said Parsons. “Discernment offers a multitude of options.”



For delegates that had never participated in consensus-based decision-making, the procedures used to consider new proposals at the Council could feel foreign. When you’re used to submitting motions and amendments to motions, when you’re used to Robert’s Rules of Order, to up and down votes, to winning and losing, the prospect of raising a colored card to indicate your feelings can be disconcerting.

But discernment processes such as those used in Leipzig are not new. The Orthodox Church and the Quakers have long used discernment procedures. The Uniting Church in Australia and religious bodies such as the World Council of Churches also follow the practice. The General Council utilized consensus-based decision-making at the Accra and

Grand Rapids meetings in 2004 and 2010 respectively. And discernment is also the norm in indigenous cultures, according to Parsons.

Venhaus had experienced a very similar discernment process in church deliberations in Argentina. When her General Council workbook arrived and she read of the WCRC’s discernment process, she was pleased.

“We don’t use the colored cards,” she said. “Once we’ve been through the discernment groups we vote ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ So I was very interested to see the way that the General Council used discernment. But I like this method very much. It’s a process that helps everybody express themselves.”

Likewise, consensus-building is common in Waweru’s native Kenya. “You have to hear everyone’s voices,” she said. “Older people, women, younger people, in my culture they all draw back when it’s time to have a discussion.” Their silence can allow adult men alone to have the final say—sometimes the only say.

“As a facilitator, you really have to learn how to draw those people out,” said Waweru. “You have to balance the dynamics of the group.”

For those who are unable to move from blue cards to orange, both Waweru and Venhaus believe the process offers respect for their convictions. Any delegate who choose could make a written dissent in the historical record. And in their experiences, both ministers agreed that oppositional views were treated

respectfully within their groups. They believed it was the only way that the discernment process could work successfully.

While consensus-based decision-making has many proponents, the process is not without its challenges. And the biggest challenge is most commonly one of time. Allowing space for every voice to be heard means you must plan time for all of those voices to speak.

Venhaus found this hurdle to be frustrating. “Sometimes, when we were discussing very emotional issues, there was only time for group members to state opinions,” she said. “If it is the intent to really find consensus, then we must have time to discuss and reason and dialogue with one another.”

Waweru agreed that time constraints sometimes made true consensus difficult. She also wondered whether decisions were sometimes impacted because of the little time available to fully weigh the pros and cons of a particular proposal.

“Because you’re all in it together, and discussing and processing as a group, you are thinking and deciding on the spot,” she said. “But, of course, we spend much time praying and seeking God’s direction in this General Council. So you trust that the Holy Spirit will work through the group.”

If the General Council’s discernment process could still use some tweaking, the decision-making strategy has proven to successfully chart the WCRC’s path into the future. And the process ensures that all members have a stake in setting the Communion’s course.

“Church decision-making should look like church, not politics,” said Parsons. “And the process should make community, not fracture it.”

Waweru agrees. “Consensus-building does not solve every issue,” she said. “But the important thing is that we all journey in the same direction. And that we journey together.” ●

—Amy Eckert

El proceso de paz en Colombia esta en peligro advierte CMIR

Advertida de los peligros para el proceso de paz en Colombia entre el gobierno y los movimientos rebeldes, la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas ha pedido al gobierno colombiano que logre un final negociado del conflicto.

La “esperanza de paz está en peligro porque un sector de la sociedad colombiana que ha mantenido sus privilegios y se ha aprovechado de la guerra insiste en buscar una victoria militar en este largo conflicto y rechaza los acuerdos de paz”, afirmó la Asamblea General de la CMIR en una resolución aprobada el 7 de julio, último día de su reunión de 9 días en Leipzig, Alemania.

En 2016, el gobierno colombiano y las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC-EP) acordaron un acuerdo de paz después de más de 50 años de conflicto armado que dejó cerca de 250.000 muertos y más de 7 millones de desplazados internos. En febrero de 2017, el gobierno inició conversaciones públicas con otro grupo armado en Colombia, el Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN).

Sin embargo, las comunidades que han vivido junto a los grupos armados se enfrentan a mayores riesgos, según la resolución de la CMIR, con los guerrilleros que están dejando sus armas y reingresando a la sociedad civil, en riesgo.

2016 y la primera mitad de 2017, casi 150 defensores y defensoras de los derechos humanos y líderes comunitarios que buscan la paz han sido asesinados, y muchos más han recibido amenazas.

La Asamblea General instruyó al Comité Ejecutivo y a la secretaria de la CMIR que “exhorten al Gobierno colombiano a que aplique de manera rápida y efectiva los acuerdos alcanzados con las FARC-EP y que continúe los diálogos con el ELN hasta que se llegue a un final negociado del conflicto y la paz con justicia social se convierta en una realidad.”

Alentó a todas las iglesias miembros de la CMIR a “compartir experiencias en la consolidación de la paz, para promover una pedagogía para la paz y la reconciliación en Colombia, buscando fortalecer una cultura de la no violencia y de resolución pacífica del conflicto histórico.”

La resolución también instó a apoyar los programas de desarrollo y educación de las iglesias colombianas en comunidades y sectores sociales que trabajan localmente para construir la paz, con énfasis en los derechos humanos, la inclusión, la sostenibilidad y el cuidado de la creación.

En una resolución aparte, la Asamblea General de la CMIR instó a realizar esfuerzos para hacer frente a los años de violencia en Guatemala, El Salvador y Honduras como resultado del conflicto de pandillas, la delincuencia organizada y el narcotráfico.

“La cultura endémica de las pandillas, junto con las realidades socio-económicas de la pobreza, el desempleo, el bajo ingreso familiar, la disfunción familiar, la violencia doméstica y los problemas psicológicos, producen enormes problemas para la sociedad y las iglesias”, expresa la resolución.

Respecto a una polarización política continua en Venezuela, la Asamblea General instó a apoyar a la iglesia en aquel país latinoamericano “para hacer frente a la necesidad de construir una cultura de paz que haga posible el diálogo y la reconciliación”.

Sobre Cuba, expresó su preocupación por “acciones unilaterales” que limitan el progreso “hacia la reconciliación entre Estados Unidos y Cuba.”

La Asamblea General instó a las iglesias de América Latina y el Caribe a “brindar apoyo y ayuda al pueblo de Cuba para superar las dificultades económicas derivadas del bloqueo impuesto a Cuba.” ●

—Stephen Brown

Une pasteure Libanaise elue presidente

Suite de la page 7

trésorier général. Avocat, il a été vice-président de l'Église protestante en Rhénanie depuis 2013, il en est le principal conseiller juridique.

Autres membres élus au Comité exécutif :

- Clayton Da Silva (Église presbytérienne indépendante au Brésil)
- Diana Erdélyi (Église réformée hongroise)
- Hilary Hagar (Église presbytérienne du Canada)
- Hefin Jones (Union des indépendants gallois)
- Annabell Lalla-Ramkelawan (Église presbytérienne à La Trinité et Tobago)
- Hong Jung Lee (Église presbytérienne en Corée)
- Coutinho Maravilhoso Moma (Église évangélique congrégationaliste en Angola)
- Veronica Muchiri (Église presbytérienne d'Afrique de l'Est)
- J. Herbert Nelson (Église presbytérienne aux États-Unis)
- Tibonge Ng'ambi (Église presbytérienne en Zambie)
- Hannah North (Église presbytérienne Aotearoa Nouvelle Zélande)
- Claudio Pasquet (Église vaudoise)
- Khid-arn Prawate (Église du Christ en Thaïlande)
- Milciades Pua (Église presbytérienne de Colombie)
- Mary Ekinde Salle (Église presbytérienne Cameroun)
- Susan Thomas (Église de l'Inde du Sud) ●

WCRC issues solidarity message with Palestinian Christians

The WCRC has urged its member churches to examine their mission, education and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in the light of the witness of Palestinian Christians.

In a resolution adopted by consensus on 7 July, the WCRC's General Council said member churches should respond to this examination "as they understand the Reformed Communion's commitments to human rights and the protections of international law."

The Council stated, "with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, that the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake."

It urged the WCRC's Executive Committee "to strengthen initiatives for dialogue, civil peace services, mediation, conflict prevention and transformation."

The resolution adopted by the Council stated that the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 had a significant consequence of "the loss of homeland for the Palestinian people, and the creation of 750,000 Palestinian refugees." It noted that it is also 50 years since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

"It is time for Israelis and Palestinians to live alongside each other in peace, security and justice," the resolution stated. "Many of us have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears the painful realities of life for Palestinians."

In its resolution, the Council stated that the Christian faith has been used to justify the injustice against the Palestinian people. It rejected any use of the Bible "to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another."



Mitri Raheb addresses the Council at one of his two Bible study sessions.

It encouraged delegations to visit the region "to connect with the present day Christian community...to witness their situation and express support for their desires for self-determination."

The resolution instructed the WCRC Executive Committee to a call from the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine urging solidarity from Christian partners abroad.

During the Council a prominent Palestinian Christian from Bethlehem, Mitri Raheb, told delegates of

his experience of having been 5 years old when Israel occupied Bethlehem.

"This was exactly 50 years ago. I know what living under occupation means," Raheb said.

It is important that "not only we as Palestinians are liberated but that Israelis are also liberated as well, because occupiers are not liberated," Raheb stated. "Occupiers are occupied by their own occupation." ●

—Stephen Brown

Available Online

The General Council Worship Committee invited Council participants to return home with the Worship Book and encouraged them to use it within their own local congregations. Now everyone is invited to download the book (in six languages), which includes original songs, prayers and responsive readings.

But the Worship Book isn't the only resource available online.

The Bible studies presented at the Council by Bae Hyun-ju, Elsa Tamez and Mitri Raheb have been posted, and more Bible studies can be found in *Prayerful Preparation*, a book (available in six languages) exploring the Council's theme, "Living God, renew and transform us," that also includes essays on theology, confessions and contexts, as well as worship resources.

Also available is all the business that came before the Council including the Delegate Workbook, reports and addresses. Both the Wittenberg Witness and the WCRC's Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) can be accessed, too.

All of this can be found through the main General Council page: wrc.ch/gc2017.

„Hilfe, die sie als unsere Mitmenschen verdienen“

Reformierte Weltgemeinschaft im Einsatz für Flüchtlinge und Migranten und gegen Menschenhandel

Die Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen (WGRK) hat bei ihrer Generalversammlung in Leipzig deutliche Worte zu den Themen Migration, Menschenhandel und Flüchtlinge gefunden. In der Abschlusskundgebung verurteilten die rund tausend Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer „alle Handlungen im Zusammenhang von Menschenhandel“. Die Generalversammlung forderte die Mitgliedskirchen dringend auf, „ihre jeweilige Regierung zur Rechenschaftspflicht heranzuziehen, wie sich diese dem Menschenhandel entgegenstellt“.

Die Delegierten aus mehr als hundert Ländern forderten den Exekutivausschuss der WGRK auf, zur Situation der Migranten, Flüchtlinge und Asylsuchenden eng mit den jeweiligen Regionen, Mitgliedskirchen und anderen Gremien zusammenzuarbeiten. Dabei soll

analysiert werden, was mit den Betroffenen in den Ländern geschieht, die sie verlassen, durchreisen und in denen sie sich niederlassen. Die Mitgliedskirchen der WGRK werden dringend gebeten, „ihre Regierungen zur Verantwortung zu ziehen, wenn es um die Unterstützung der Migranten geht.“ Zudem sollen Fördermaßnahmen zugunsten benachteiligter Gruppen unterstützt werden, ebenso Programme, die Möglichkeiten für Arbeitsmigranten, Flüchtlinge und Menschen, die in die Mühlen des Menschenhandels geraten sind, schaffen.

Ziel müsse es sein, so die Versammlung, „gemeinsam die Regierungen, Medien und Menschen in unseren Ländern“ anzusprechen, damit „alles Notwendige getan wird und Menschen die Hilfe bekommen, die sie brauchen und als unsere Mitmenschen verdienen“. Es gelte eine Antwort auf die Frage zu finden, „wie wir miteinander als Menschen und als Menschen des Glaubens in dieser Situation umgehen“. Dazu seien auch die theologischen, spirituellen und pastoralen Herausforderungen für die Mitgliedskirchen zu erwägen. Gleichzeitig richtete die

Versammlung die Bitte an alle Mitgliedskirchen, sich im WGRK-Programm „Broken for you“ zu engagieren, einer internationalen Kampagne zur Bekämpfung des Menschenhandels.

Im Abschlussbericht hieß es wörtlich: „Der Aufbruch von Hunderttausenden von Flüchtlingen zeigt auf, womit die Kirchen heute konfrontiert werden. Frauen, Männer, jung und alt fliehen vor Krieg, Armut und Verfolgung. Tagtäglich riskieren Menschen ihr Leben, um Leben, Frieden und Gerechtigkeit zu suchen.“ Dies könnten reformierte Kirchen nicht als unvermeidlich hinnehmen.

Menschen, die Zuflucht suchen, seien nicht nur eine ethische und politische Herausforderung, sondern sie forderten die Kirchen „in ihrer innersten theologischen Identität und Mission“ heraus. Die Generalversammlung berief sich dabei auch auf die lange Tradition der Reformierten im Engagement für das Leben, die Würde und das Wohlergehen von Flüchtlingen und



Graffiti in einer Straße von Thessaloniki.

Migranten. Dabei formulierte sie auch die Erkenntnis, dass Probleme menschlicher Migration nicht in einem Vakuum existieren und nur völlig verstanden werden könnten, „wenn wir erkennen, wie sie mit anderen Problemen der Gerechtigkeit überall in der Welt zusammenhängen.“

Menschenhandel wurde von der Versammlung ausdrücklich als „moderne Form von Sklaverei“ bezeichnet. Menschen in verletzlichen Situationen würden ausgenutzt – darunter viele tausend Kinder pro Jahr: „Diese Ungerechtigkeit trifft jährlich Millionen von Menschen auf jedem Kontinent. Dies hat direkte Auswirkungen auf das physische, mentale und spirituelle Wohlergehen der Opfer“, heißt es im Bericht der reformierten Weltgemeinschaft. Opfer von Menschenhandel würden oft gezwungen und betrogen und zur Arbeits- und sexuellen Ausbeutung gehandelt: „Sie können schrecklichen physischen, emotionalen, sexuellen und psychologischen Missbrauch erleben.“ ●

—Bernd Becker



Members of the Leipzig Reformed Church meet to discuss plans for the General Council.

Leipzig's Reformed Church relishes opportunity to host Council

When Pastor Elke Bucksch learned in 2015 that the WCRC would hold its 2017 General Council meeting in eastern Germany, she couldn't have been happier. When it was decided just a few months later to convene the meeting in Leipzig, her whole congregation got excited.

"Everyone thought this would be a great chance to get to know our Reformed church brothers and sisters," said Bucksch.

The Protestant Reformed Church in Leipzig traces its roots to the late 17th century. The congregation originally consisted of French Huguenots who, facing religious persecution elsewhere, fled to Leipzig. The congregation's first services, which began in 1700, were conducted in French.

Once Leipzig had been identified as the location for the Council, Bucksch, who has pastored the Protestant Reformed Church in Leipzig since 2009, began immediate discussions with her congregation how their church might be involved. Vicar Selma Dorn came on the church staff in January 2017 and joined in the planning. Both women are lifelong Reformed Church members.

Dorn was involved with the Youth Gathering in Zwochau that preceded

the General Council. Both women worked with a host of church volunteers to offer prayer gatherings and other services throughout the assembly. And the Protestant Reformed Church's choir took part in a new Psalm concert the evening of July 4, performing a piece commissioned specifically for the Council.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of the Leipzig Reformed Church's enthusiasm for the Council was seen at the June 29 opening reception in the church's courtyard. Bucksch and Dorn received offers from 80 volunteers—a number roughly equivalent to an average Sunday's church attendance—to help host the event.

"We really weren't sure we had enough work to keep all of those volunteers busy!" said Dorn.

Of special interest to the congregation of the Protestant Reformed Church in Leipzig are the General Council's emphases on peace and justice. The congregation has been intrigued by discussions surrounding reconciliation in the Middle East and between North and South Korea.

"Many members told me this was the same situation their church found itself in just 20 or 25 years ago," said Dorn. When the World Alliance of

Reformed Churches (WARC) met in Frankfurt in 1964, Germany had only recently been divided into two—and Leipzig's Reformed Church members lived behind a wall.

During that council, WARC sent a delegation from West Germany into East Germany for communion and discussion with local churches. Twenty-five years later, in 1989, the nearby church of St. Nicholas made an impact on the world as the initiator of peace prayers that would eventually help reunify Germany. Dorn believes wholeheartedly that the involvement of Christians made a difference in the lives of people across East Germany.

"We believe that the church can make a difference in the world," said Dorn. "We have seen it ourselves." And if this General Council in Leipzig can make even a tiny contribution to reconciliation in other splintered segments of the world, the congregation of the Reformed Church in Leipzig will consider their volunteer hours well spent. ●

—Amy Eckert

New executive staff named

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) will welcome a pair of new executive secretaries to its staff in January 2018. Philip Peacock joins as the executive secretary for justice and witness while Hanns Lessing comes on as the executive secretary for theology and communion.

Peacock, an ordained presbyter in the Church of North India, has been



Hanns Lessing



Philip Peacock

active in ecumenical work for more than a decade, including participating in the last two General Councils, as a lecturer for the Global Institute of Theology (teaching a class on “Positive Masculinities”) and as a member of the WCRC Justice Network and the “Broken for You” anti-human trafficking working group. He has spoken and written extensively, includ-

ing an essay on “Empire” in *Prayerful Preparation: Exploring the 2017 General Council Theme* and a keynote address at the Council’s justice plenary.

“I see a commitment to justice as not just arising out of our faith but as a better way of being Christian,” says Peacock. “I also strongly believe that mission today is resistance to empire and that being a Christian who draws from the Reformed traditions means that we are committed to a particular positionality on the margins from which we seek to dismantle all hierarchies.”

“I believe the WCRC is at the forefront of the movement towards justice in the context of the church and the ecumenical movement,” says Peacock. “As a small organization it is uniquely placed to be prophetic.”

Peacock has a ThM degree from Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary with a focus on Dalit theology and gender studies and is presently completing his PhD studies through Radboud University in the Netherlands. He is currently an associate professor at Bishops College, Kolkata, where he has been in the department of social analysis since June 2000.

Lessing, an ordained minister in the Evangelical Church of Westphalia with a PhD from the University of Heidelberg, currently serves as the WCRC’s General Council coordinator. As a seminary professor in Namibia for a decade he focused on systematic theology and ecumenism. Alongside this work, he dedicated his energies to church projects in Namibia, South Africa and Germany aimed at coming to terms with legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Lessing engaged 50 international, interdisciplinary scholars in a study process (now published) which has created a usable platform for churches to engage the wounds and divisions that attend these legacies.

Lessing sees Christian faith and theology as a powerful resource in the struggles of our day. As he says, “theology matters,” and it can “both guide and motivate our work for justice.” “He is enthusiastic about coordinating the work of theology and communion for the WCRC.

“I like to work in positions where I can connect to people from all over the world on questions of faith,” says Lessing. “I think the network of the WCRC is particularly interesting because the WCRC as an organization works as a communion which actually brings people together in interaction from different continents, theological backgrounds and cultural backgrounds.”

Before making their unanimous recommendation to the Executive Committee just prior to the 2017 General Council, the search committee discussed issues of gender bal-

ance, especially as Peacock and Lessing join two men already on staff, General Secretary Chris Ferguson and Phil Tanis, executive secretary for communications.

“Though it would be advantageous to have women serving in either of these two positions, this is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the gender justice work that needs to happen in the WCRC,” says Anna Case-Winters, chair of the search committee. “Women in leadership at every level must be on the table of consideration. I am heartened by several actions taken at this General Council that signal our concern for gender justice: our declaration on the ordination of women, our expressed commitment to seek gender balance in all future staffing and elections, the fully representative Executive Committee we just elected and in particular the election of Najla Kassab as president.”

Case-Winters also noted that other factors for balance were considered and achieved, including geographic origin, age and race—and that the candidates’ gifts, skills, experiences and personal aptitudes were decisive in the final decision. “Both Philip and Hanns have strong records in terms of their advocacy for gender justice,” she added.

Prior to Peacock and Lessing’s public presentation at the Council, the assembly passed a motion that stated, “To reflect the Communion’s commitment to gender equality...in the hiring process of senior staff, gender equity will be pursued vigorously with a clear goal of at least 50% female.” This mandate will certainly have an impact on future hires.

The search committee consisted of Case-Winters, Omega Bula, Ferguson, General Treasurer Johann Weusmann and the outgoing officers of the WCRC: President Jerry Pillay and vice presidents Yueh-Wen Lu, Yvette Noble Bloomfield, Bastiaan Plaisier and Helis Barraza Díaz. ●

Special thanks

The General Council would never have been possible without some considerable support. Numerous individuals and organizations have contributed with small and large donations to the Council in all its diversity. The WCRC is immensely grateful to each and every one of them.

Our very special thanks go to the following organizations in particular:



Auswärtiges Amt

The WCRC thanks the **German Ministry of Foreign Affairs**. The delegates to the General Council originating from the Global South could not have come to Europe without its far-reaching support.

The WCRC thanks the **City of Leipzig** first of all for its warm hospitality but also for its manifold assistance in organizational matters. The WCRC is particularly grateful to the City of Leipzig for helping in building cultural bridges reaching from Bach to modern music, from music to the visual arts.



The WCRC thanks the federal government's **Commissioner for Culture and the Media** for her great support in the realization of an extraordinary Psalm Concert and a Social Arts Project, which are both expressions of Reformed thinking.



Die Beauftragte
der Bundesregierung
für Kultur und Medien

The WCRC thanks the **Federal Ministry for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Youths** for sponsoring our young generation and especially our Youth Gathering "Meet the World."



Bundesministerium
für Familie, Senioren,
Frauen und Jugend

Other churches and denominations have also given generous support to this assembly of the Reformed family:

The WCRC thanks **Brot für die Welt** for contributing through its development service: Aspects of sustainable development play an important role in our speeches and discussions and the financial contribution facilitates the global transfer and exchange of knowledge.



The WCRC thanks **Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland (EMW)** for its support of the Global Institute of Theology, which contributes to the sharing of theological education and helps future theologians from all parts of the world in their ministry.



The WCRC thanks the **Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)** as the communion of Protestant churches in Germany who expressed its solidarity with the churches of the Global South in particular through its generous financial aid.



Evangelische Kirche
in Deutschland



Union Evangelischer Kirchen
in der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland

The WCRC thanks the **Union of Protestant Churches (UEK)** for its extensive support, which made it possible to bring together participants from Reformed churches coming from all parts of the world to join in this colorful and diverse Council. ●

From the General Secretary

continued from page 24

We emerged from the Council strengthened as a communion and reinvigorated in our ecumenical vocation and our call to transformative justice. Reaffirming our vision of a Reformed family always reforming, committed to renewing ourselves, fully aware of the scandalous reality afflicting the global human family as all of creation groans in travail. The agenda before us is enormous and enormously challenging!

We must address in new ways the divisions that threaten to divide us. We must find new ways to sustain our common work financially. We must transform ourselves in our programmes and decision-making so that all our regions fully participate. We commit over the next seven years to live out this transformation and serve unity and justice, deepen our theological, biblical and missiological imperative and fully integrate the witness for justice, peace and reconciliation.

We give thanks to the God of Life that we emerge not only renewed and encouraged in our vision but also gifted with extraordinary leadership. Rev. Najla Kassab, our new president, is well positioned to lead us in our commitments to gender justice, communion building, peace and reconciliation. We are well blessed with officers and Executive Committee members who represent our Communion's diversity in age, gender, region and talents.

We now must translate the compelling vision emerging from the Council into a strategic plan for the next seven years. God has infused us with the hope and grace necessary so that we might "be transformed by the renewing of our minds" so that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Thanks be to God. ●



Chris Ferguson

From the General Secretary

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will is of God, what is acceptable and good and perfect.”
(Romans 12:2, NRSV).

Guided by this high call of the Apostle Paul the General Council embraced the theme “Living God, renew and transform us” urgently, prayerfully, humbly, joyfully and thoughtfully. It was a significant, powerful and historic moment for our Communion.

Discerning the will of the Living God moved, energized, challenged, interrogated and inspired us in our Bible studies, keynotes, plenaries, worship services and most especially in our consensus and discernment processes. We strove to transform the way we make decisions so that our discernment helped us strengthen our Communion through honouring the role of all the participants consistent with our theological traditions of conciliarity and the ministry of all believers. It is encouraging that in a Council which saw so many significant and historic moments a highlight for many delegates was this decision-making process.

The theological and biblical presentations were uniformly profound and provocative. It was heartening and hopeful to see the WCRC family growing into a shared vision where God’s call to unity, justice and our ecumenical vocation inspire us to boldly embrace our Reformed tradition while weaving a new identity for common witness inclusive of our Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, United and Uniting and First Reformation traditions.

Among the significant examples was the day in Wittenberg, set in the context of the commemoration of 500 years of Reformation. In signing the “association” with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification our Communion vigorously joined the cloud of witnesses confessing our role in the tragic divisions of the past while bringing the Reformation into the present tense, declaring with the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists and Anglicans that it is possible and necessary to overcome our divisions for the unity of the church and the transformation of the world. In doing so we lifted up a distinct Reformed perspective on justification and justice which our sister communions received with appreciation.

Equally important was the Wittenberg Witness, an action-oriented undertaking by the WCRC and the Lutheran World Federation to take concrete steps in greater work together—on all levels. I give thanks to God that the commitment to the unity of the whole church continues to drive and inspire the WCRC. Anything less would be a betrayal both of our Reformed roots and the powerful gift of our United and Uniting churches.

The inseparability of communion and justice was a guiding vision through the Council. The Declaration of Faith on Women’s Ordination and strong actions on gender justice moved us closer to living out our commitment to being just and inclusive. We reaffirmed in a variety of ways the relevance of the Barmen Declaration and the Belhar and Accra confessions. Mission is firmly at the centre of our life as a communion guided by the a biblical vision and a faith stance that holds together economic, ecological and gender justice with a commitment to inclusive community.

There was no doubt that our Communion, which includes over 100 million individuals, is engaged in the struggle to bring the Reformation into the present tense. The unfinished theological agenda of the Reformation calls us to create space to hear and share a greater diversity of voices and theologies from the whole range of contexts that make up our family and not give pride of place to one perspective.

Addressing our responsibilities in the face of the massive threat to life in the global context was an essential dimension to our Council. The Korean Christian Federation from North Korea with our churches from South Korea shared in profound moments of worship together and called on us to continue to seek to de-escalate the current conflict and bring about peaceful reunification.

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To receive your free subscription, send an email to wrcr@wrcr.eu or send a request by post to:

WCRC
Calvin Centre
Knochenhauerstrasse 42
30159 Hannover, Germany

tel: +49 511 8973 8310
fax: +49 511 8973 8311

wrcr@wrcr.eu
www.wrcr.ch
facebook.com/worldcommunion
twitter.com/reformedcomunio

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