

Called to communion,
committed to justice



World Communion
of Reformed Churches



ANNUAL REPORT 2018

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About the World Communion of Reformed Churches

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is comprised of 100 million Christians in Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian and other pre-Reformation churches. The WCRC, working with its 230+ member churches, is active in supporting theology, justice, church unity and mission in over 105 countries.

United in Christ and rooted in the historic Reformed traditions, the WCRC with its member churches believe that God calls Christians to be part of the transformation of the world through the love of Jesus Christ by meeting spiritual needs and fostering justice for all.

Member churches pay annual dues that support the core costs of the communion: governance, communication, travel and staff.



INTRODUCTION

Reflecting and acting on God's love

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."
—John 10:10 (NRSV)

We live in a world awash in conflicts and injustices. Jesus Christ agrees—but still insists that all will have abundant life.

We in the World Communion of Reformed Churches have taken up this call, and it is strongly incorporated into our strategic plan, which includes this statement in its overarching goal:

The World Communion of Reformed Churches, with all the partners God provides, serves its member churches and also works for the transformation of the whole world, which is so loved by God but still trapped by multiple injustices and death, having fallen among thieves.

All that we say and do is directed toward this goal, "the transformation of the whole world, which is so loved by God." You will find stories in this annual report that

give but a small taste of the work we have done in the past year, most of which is focused through the goal's interlocking dimensions:

- » Communion
- » Justice
- » Theology
- » Mission
- » Ecumenical Engagement

The WCRC continues to be stirred up and mobilized as we are "called to communion and committed to justice." We are called to communion to share the suffering and hope in our whole family, a family of churches that is arising so that God's glory, humanity and earth fully alive, will be fulfilled. After all what less can be said for followers of Jesus who proclaimed in the midst of the bleakest of times, "I have come so that all may have life and life abundant."

Najla Kassab
President

Chris Ferguson
General Secretary

STRATEGIC PLAN

New plan directs Communion through 2024

The WCRC Executive Committee adopted a strategic plan to guide the work and witness of the organization through 2024. The approved strategic plan includes a new vision statement, an overarching goal, numerous objectives to reach the goal and structures to implement the plan.

“The 2017 General Council entrusted us with a big number of actions, concerns and challenges. Prioritizing and setting a timetable is vital for our success and progress,” said President Najla Kassab.

Rathnakara Sadananda, the general secretary of the Church of South India, was the moderator of the Strategic Planning Committee. “This is a good plan that captures dreams and aspirations of the Reformed family, as well as the directions set by the General Council. It sincerely attempts to strive towards a realistic goal that

will both strengthen the Communion and engage us more deeply with the Word and world.”

Based on the decisions and spirit of the 2017 General Council the creation of the plan included the participation of people from around the world, providing input through numerous “working groups” on specific issues and a “Mission and Vision: Widening the Circle” consultation, which raised voices that are outside the traditional centres of power.

“The process itself was an exercise in communion strengthening and commitment to justice,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary. “The Widening the Circle consultation already pushed us forward with our tasks of critical theological reflection and ‘reforming’ our life as a communion so that all voices are heard and power imbalances are redressed.”



WCRC Vision Statement

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is called to communion and is committed to justice.

Through robust engagement with the Word of God and the call of the Holy Spirit, the World Communion of Reformed Churches is always being transformed as it strives for the full and just participation of all. In our

diversity, we seek to be a living expression of “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

We work to renew and restore the economy and the earth, so that all humanity and the whole of creation might live life in its fullness (Deuteronomy 30:19; John 10:10).





COMMUNION

Consultation strengthens communion through diversity

The 2017 General Council recognized a variety of challenges to building a better communion, including linguistic and cultural tensions, as well as differences in theological and hermeneutical perspectives.

The Council committed the WCRC to “set the atmosphere for dialogue and discernment on communion and diversity—in a spirit of consensus building where there are no winners or losers, where no one is excluded, where all are protected and where mutual challenge, mutual accountability and grace become key values.”

A first step in this process was taken with a consultation held in Chennai, India, on the theme “Strengthening the Communion: Communion and Human Sexuality.”

After days of presentations, discussions and deliberations the consultation participants made six commitments seeking God’s voice and wisdom related to human sexuality:

1. Commit to the Bible
2. Commit to critical Reformed theological engagement
3. Journeying together seeking God’s voice
4. Commit to the radical hospitality that Jesus called us to
5. Commit to continued conversation
 - » respect
 - » love
 - » trust
 - » listening to a variety of voices including those most affected
6. Commit to praying for and with one another

The “Chennai Process” will continue, taking up the commitments to further respectful discussion throughout the Communion.

JUSTICE

Ecumenical alliance works for economic and climate justice

The third meeting of the Ecumenical Panel on a New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) took place in April in New York City to coincide with the United Nations Economic and Social Council Forum on Financing for Development.

The panel was called to order by reminding the gathering that, “We are meeting to review our tasks, identify signs of economic and climatic injustice, set priority actions, make new alliances, update the NIFEA plan and together make a deepened commitment to build a world that better resembles God’s true kingdom.”

NIFEA is a joint initiative by the WCRC, Council for World Mission (CWM), Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and World Council of Churches (WCC).

This Ecumenical Panel on NIFEA seeks to analyze the signs of the times for the economy and the earth by reconnecting finance to real economy, set limits on greed by dismantling structures that protect the corrupt, and build up new structures that better

respond to current economic, political, social and ecological contexts.

“We have been called to defend and protect the gifts of life, and we ask the question: What are the one or two compelling things we can do together that would be so strategic, it would bring about a powerful and dramatic change for the good of all God’s creations?” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary. “This is a commitment we are making to economic and ecological transformation with justice as our center. I have heard strongly that this group wants to work together on these issues.”

“The real issue at hand is the dignity of humanity and the integrity of creation,” said Collin Cowan, CWM general secretary. “We need a band of disciples who are committed to justice and peace and focused on a mission for life in fullness for all creation. Let us commit ourselves to the principles of mutuality, partnership and hope in action. It is up to us to reclaim our dignity and be the change we desire.”







THEOLOGY

Ecumenical dialogues look to build common witness

The WCRC is shifting its focus on ecumenical dialogues from striving for doctrinal consensus to relationship building that will lead to common witness.

While the theological search for doctrinal consensus still has a place in relations between Christian communions, the issues in today's world that shape our self-understanding are a more relevant and practical entry point to pave the way for a common witness.

The commitment to the visibility of the larger church remains imperative. Church divisions hamper the Christian witness of justice, peace and reconciliation and therefore call for a courageous testimony of Christian unity.

The WCRC therefore is committed to multilateral dialogues that tackle hard theological divisions that prevent the joint celebration of Holy Communion and the recognition of churches and ministries. The WCRC is also particularly committed to the recognition of the Presbyterian and synodical church order and the ordination of women.

In the light of these principles the 2017 General Council and the strategic plan have formulated recommendations that guide ecumenical engagement. Ecumenical dialogues will:

- » strive at relationship building for joint witness and focus on themes of relevance for the WCRC and its member churches' mission of unity and justice
- » be conducted in a multilateral format and address the difficult obstacles to Christian unity that prevent the joint celebration of Holy Communion and the recognition of churches and ministries
- » apply a global perspective rooted in contextual realities and give room to a post-colonial critique of the current ecumenical discourse

The WCRC is currently finishing dialogues with the Anglican Communion and representatives from Pentecostal churches. It will soon be starting a dialogue with the Mennonite World Conference while continuing to deepen the relationship with the Lutheran World Federation.





MISSION

Hope drives Iraqi churches

The strength of hope continues to drive the few remaining Presbyterian churches in Iraq, a WCRC delegation found on a solidarity visit.

“Although they are very few, they have a vision of hope where they see their role in society as something very vital,” said President Najla Kassab.

The delegation—composed of representatives from the WCRC, National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, Presbyterian Church (USA) and Synod of the Nile (Egypt)—spent more than a week in October visiting with the leaders and churches of the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Iraq (NEPCI), which are not yet members of the WCRC, in three different cities.

They face many challenges, including societal corruption, high emigration and leadership development. The WCRC’s three member churches each offered assistance to address some of these issues, most especially leadership development and reconnecting to the world.

Farouk Hammo, NEPCI president, said that they were looking to the WCRC not for mere support for their ministry programmes, but to belong to a global family of churches so as to enhance their standing in Iraq.

“This is about building bridges with other churches, especially in the Middle East, sharing the pain and the vision and the hope with these churches,” said Kassab.

Despite their small sizes, the three churches run extensive programmes and projects. Their work includes a women’s prison ministry, radio stations, refugee housing, water provision, a community gym and daycares, nurseries and kindergartens.

“They challenged us on how we understand the mission of the church,” said Kassab. “They feel they will continue on this outreach to society. We sensed the leaders are respected by the different groups we met because they were ready to live their faith outside the walls of the church.”

WITNESS

WCRC advocates for peace

The WCRC works closely with its member churches and ecumenical partners in some of the most fractious areas in the world, striving to bring peace to places that haven't felt it in decades.

South Sudan, Colombia, the Middle East and Korean Peninsula are but four of the areas in which the WCRC is at work, witnessing for the God of Peace against the complex and powerful forces that would prefer conflict to continue.

The WCRC Executive Committee held its 2018 meeting in Seoul, South Korea, purposefully to underline the Communion's commitment to the peace process on the peninsula. During the meeting Committee members visited the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). At a special worship service at a military chapel in the DMZ, Committee members shared how their regions are impacted by conflict and raised prayers for peace.

Prior to the meeting, a joint WCRC-World Council of Churches (WCC) delegation visited church leaders and government officials in North Korea, continuing a series of visits by the WCRC to build bridges to Christian sisters and brothers in that country.

"Together, the WCC and the WCRC are committed to mobilizing our churches around the world in support of these new steps towards the peace that we have so long sought and desired for the people of the peninsula and the northeast Asian region," said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary.

The delegation urged "all churches, all Christians called by our Lord Jesus Christ to be peacemakers, and all people of good will around the world to join in supporting the Korean-led initiatives for peace expressed in the Panmunjom Declaration, as a foundation and framework for achieving a sustainable peace for the Korean people, for the region and for the world."







ECUMENICAL ENGAGEMENT

GEM School “a powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit”

“Economic and ecological injustice is a faith imperative and it is inseparable from the belief in God. Concentration of power in the hands of the few is theologically incorrect,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, at the opening of the GEM School in Mexico City.

The Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management (GEM) for an Economy of Life took place in August in Mexico City. The 10-day programme was attended by church leaders, theologians and activists from diverse backgrounds, inviting churches to actively participate and strengthen their role and voice in the context of global economics.

“We need to put Jesus at the centre of economic justice and to do this is to displace the market system with an

economy that is directed towards the needs of people,” said Roderick Hewitt in the keynote address.

The GEM School, a joint initiative of the WCRC, World Council of Churches (WCC) and Council for World Mission (CWM) aims to develop economic literacy within churches by equipping future leaders with a better understanding of churches’ engagement in mission and witness for economic justice. It is part of the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) programme.

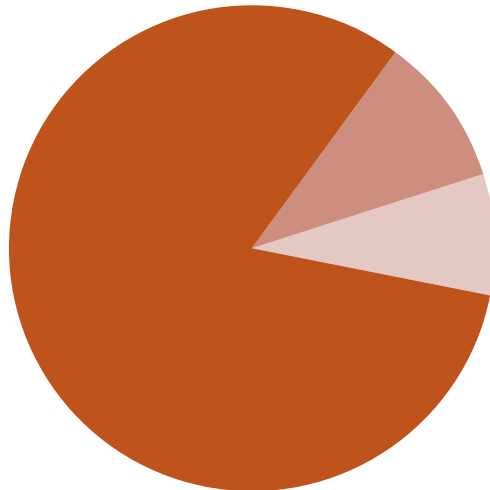
“In our unity we are sending an unambiguous message that we need a new international financial and economic architecture grounded in prophetic gospel values of our shared humanity where emphasis is on a life of dignity for all and for the protection of the earth,” said Isabel Apawo Phiri, WCC deputy general secretary.





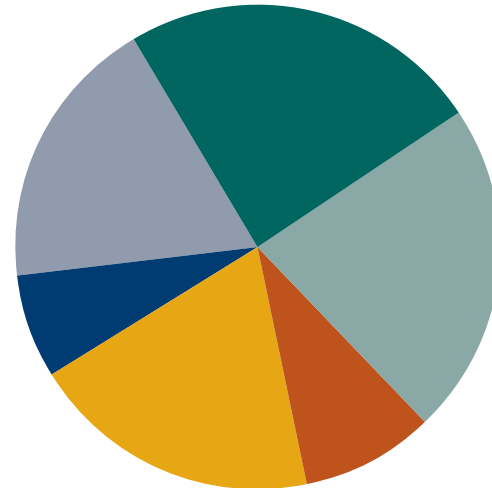
FINANCES

2017 Income



- Membership Contributions ... 82%
- Donations 10%
- Others 8%

2017 Programme Expenses



- Communion 24%
- Justice 22%
- Theology 9%
- Mission 19%
- Ecumenical Engagement 7%
- Partnership Fund 18%





EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers

President

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National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

Vice Presidents

Sylvana Maria Apituley
Protestant Church in West Indonesia

Samuel Ayete-Nyampong
Presbyterian Church of Ghana

Raissa Vieira Brasil
United Presbyterian Church of Brazil

Lisa Vander Wal
Reformed Church in America

General Treasurer

Johann Weusmann
Evangelical Church in the Rhineland

General Secretary

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United Church of Canada

Members of the Executive Committee:

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Independent
Presbyterian Church
of Brazil

Diana Erdélyi
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Hilary Hagar
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in Canada

Hefin Jones
Union of Welsh
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Ramkelawan**
Presbyterian
Church of Trinidad
and Tobago

Hong Jung Lee
Presbyterian
Church of Korea

**Coutinho
Maravilhoso Moma**
Evangelical
Congregational
Church in Angola

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Presbyterian Church
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Church (USA)

Tibonge Ng'ambi
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of Zambia

Hannah North
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New Zealand

Claudio Pasquet
Waldensian Evangelical
Church

Khid-arn Prawate
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in Thailand

Milciades Pua
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Presbyterian Church
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Susan Thomas
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Chin-Siong Lian
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Area Council

**Martina
Wasserloos-Strunk**
WCRC Europe

Agnaldo P. Gomes
Alliance of Presbyterian
and Reformed Churches
in Latin America

Angela Martins
Caribbean and North
American Area Council



Staff dressed in black for the #ThursdaysInBlack anti-violence-against-women campaign



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Church of North India

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RESOURCES



WCRC website: wrc.ch

Visit our website for worship resources, prayer requests, reports, publications, news releases and messages from churches. While visiting the site, you can make an online donation!



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Reformed Communiqué

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Reformed World

Published three times per year in English. Available by paid subscription through the website.

Monthly e-news summary

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