

Reformed communiqué

DECEMBER 2019

Mission in Context: From “witness” to “with-ness”

A group of twenty-six church leaders, theologians, and activists have called for a prophetic theology which reflects God’s concern for compassionate justice.

They gathered at the Beit El Salam Retreat Centre (Alexandria, Egypt) to share their experiences, deliberate and discuss the missiological question: How can Christian witness and peaceful co-existence be initiated and maintained in a context where Christians are the minority, often facing violence and marginalization from the majority community?

In doing so they took the next steps to fulfil the 2017 General Council mandate “to establish a framework for peaceful co-existence and the protection of the rights of minorities” (Action 53).

The participants understood that the current geo-political reality can be described as “global apartheid,” marked by ethno-nationalism, racism, authoritarianism, fundamentalisms and extremism linked to different religions and rising fascisms.

“We heard the cries of people from other contexts around the world, where people live as minorities, not just from the perspective of being religious minorities but also minorities on the basis of race, ethnicity, caste, economic oppression, gender and language,” states part of their draft message, which is still being finalized.

The message states that it is necessary to have “a prophetic theology



which reflects God’s concern for compassionate justice as without the fulfilling of this justice, peaceful co-existence is impossible.”

Participants represented a wide range of experiences and contexts, including from those in majority and in minority situations, and as they listened to each other, they began to understand how nuanced their positions were.

“We define minority not in terms of number but in terms of power and access to resources, decision-making processes and opportunity to develop one’s own agency. Minorities are thus those who are excluded from meaningful participation in society and in church,” they noted.

The consultation offered a comprehensive contextual and global analysis by hearing voices from different contexts around the world, including Angola, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kenya, the Philippines, Latin Ameri-

ca, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom.

Participants stressed that the context of mission today is operating within the existence of a global empire; noting that empire is the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that is constituted by a reality and spirit of lordless domination, created by humankind.

“Our discussions enabled the lifting up of the histories and ongoing ramifications of colonialism as we heard continuing stories of economic and political re-colonization that have resulted in a competition for resources and a pitting of communities against each other,” they said.

The stories shared from those who live within the belly of empire offered further analysis of how ideologies and theologies of authoritarianism and ethno-nationalism are being used to turn against the most

Continued on page 2

Mission in Context:
continued from page 1

marginalized and are in service of "othering" the vulnerable.

John Calvin informed their deliberations. "Calvin spoke of all those 'who cannot bear injustice'—not only those upon whom injustice is inflicted, but those who cry out on their behalf, and therefore do what is right and just. In their cry, as well, God hears Godself, and in their doing of justice and their undoing of injustice the wounds of God are healed," states the message.

Participants charged the church to journey with the marginalized in a solidarity of "with-ness." This goes beyond presence and seeks to hear from and be led by those who have been forced to the margins of society and those within marginalized communities who experience discrimination and exclusion.

They further challenged the churches who are numerical minorities yet have considerable power and privilege due to their global and economic connections to understand that they are called to journey with those who are marginalized and persecuted.

"Our faith proclaims the victory of Christ, and through him ours, over the power of sin and death, fear and powerlessness we shall no longer be afraid and commit ourselves to the task of prophetic witness, led by and journeying with those who are marginalized," the message concludes.

Once the message is finalized it will be shared publicly and distributed throughout the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

The consultation developed the foundations for further conversations on mission, especially in the context of crisis and marginalization. Its findings will conceptually inform the next steps in the process. ●

—Jessica Bwali

Accra Confession focuses justice work in Africa

The Accra Confession was the focus of a capacity building consultation that gathered over three dozens church leaders from across Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, in early November.

The Accra Confession, adopted by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and reaffirmed at the World Communion of Reformed Churches Uniting General Council, is based on the theological conviction that the economic and ecological injustices of today's global economy require the Reformed family to respond as a matter of faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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

"The Accra Confession is important because it speaks to issues of justice that are of concern to the women in my church and community," said Veronica Muchiri of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa and a member of the WCRC Executive Committee. "Many women are struggling to make a living to feed their families and take their children to school. The question of economic justice is constantly on their minds as they see other people who are extremely rich, driving big cars and living in posh homes. They wonder whether they are children of a lesser God."

Setri Nyomi, former WCRC general secretary and a minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, said, "In the work my church is doing, it is in our consciousness that injustice is wrong, and has brought much suffering to many in our communities. For some of us when we preach or engage in pastoral care, the values of the Accra Confession shape our messaging."

Fifteen years after its adoption, the Accra Confession is "still very relevant today even more than when it was first written. The urgency for the churches to confront and speak out against injustice needs to be louder and clearer now than ever before," said Muchiri.

And yet it was widely acknowledged that the confession is not well utilized. "The Accra Confession is the WCRC's gift to the world. It needs to be in every conversation of WCRC leadership at all levels with its member churches at all levels," said Nyomi.

To that end, participants at the consultation committed to renew their efforts to engage in it through theological reflections and other ways to bring it alive among the people.

The consultation was supported by funding from Otto per Mille. ●



Boesak incite la CMER à poursuivre sa lutte au niveau mondial

Les luttes pour la justice et la dignité humaine se poursuivent partout », a déclaré Allan Boesak, dans un discours prononcé lors d'une réunion de planification stratégique la semaine dernière près d'Alexandrie, en Égypte.

« Prétendre qu'une lutte n'est pas nécessaire, ou qu'il n'y a pas de luttes en cours, est un mensonge. Il en est de même quand on prétend que la lutte contre l'oppression n'est pas un devoir pour ceux qui croient en un Dieu juste et compatissant », dit-il. « Les héritiers de la tradition réformée en savent encore plus. Calvin nous enseigne que Dieu considère que Dieu lui-même a été maltraité dans les blessures infligées aux êtres humains créés à l'image de Dieu. »

« Dieu devient le pauvre et l'opprimé », dit-il.

Définissant la situation actuelle comme une lutte contre « l'apartheid mondial qui inclut l'exploitation et les inégalités socio-économiques, l'exclusion politique et sociale, la discrimination raciale et ethnique, ainsi que l'injustice sexuelle et l'oppression hétéronormative », Boesak s'est tourné vers John Calvin.

« Calvin a compris que la pleine humanité, c'est-à-dire une vie significative comme enfants libres de Dieu dotés de droits inaliénables à la considération, à la justice, à l'équité, aux choix et à la dignité, ne peut se réaliser tant que les gens demeurent dans les chaînes des hésitations sociales, des carences économiques et de l'ambiguïté politique. Il faut de la liberté », a dit M. Boesak.

« C'est pourquoi, à de nombreuses reprises, Calvin parle de tyrannie, c'est-à-dire d'oppression politique, d'exploitation économique et de privation du peuple de ses droits et de ses choix par des lois et pratiques injustes, comme totalement



inacceptable, de rébellion contre Dieu, de déni des droits des impuissants et de dénigrement des droits de Dieu, » a-t-il déclaré. « Et c'est pourquoi Calvin insiste sur le fait que ne pas se lever en résistance contre cette oppression est de la « lâcheté ». Se dresser contre elle est un devoir sacré. »

M. Boesak, ancien président de l'Alliance réformée mondiale (une organisation qui a précédé la Communion mondiale d'églises réformées (CMER), est un théologien sud-africain, militant des droits de l'homme et premier titulaire de la Chaire Desmond Tutu pour des études de Paix, Justice et Réconciliation au Christian Theological Seminary and à l'université Butler.

Chris Ferguson, Secrétaire général de la CMER, a déclaré : « Quand nous nous réunissons de partout dans le monde, nous apportons nos contextes avec nous. Le poids du monde est entièrement sur nous, et nous devons répondre à la menace massive qui pèse sur la vie, nous devons répondre au Dieu créateur, sacrifier la présence de Dieu parmi nous, dans tous nos contextes. »

Il a ajouté que discerner, confesser, témoigner et le fait d'être réformés ensemble conduit la CMER, en tant que Koinonia mondiale, à travailler dans cinq domaines stratégiques : 1) cultiver

une communion juste, 2) s'engager pour la justice, 3) faire de la théologie pour la transformation, 4) engager la mission de Dieu dans un contexte de crise et 5) travailler avec tous les partenaires que Dieu fournit.

« En tant que Koinonia mondiale appelée à la communion et engagée pour la justice, nous devons continuer à renforcer nos relations les uns avec les autres, tout en intensifiant notre travail pour un impact mondial accru », a souligné Ferguson, tout cela pour « devenir ce que nous nous devons être, et pas seulement faire ce que nous sommes censés faire. »

Nady Labib, modérateur du Synode du Nil, Eglise évangélique d'Égypte, a souligné : « Les cris des pauvres, des opprimés, des marginalisés, des oubliés et des réduits au silence montrent l'arrogance des puissants, le besoin de l'arrivée du Royaume de Dieu en Christ où il y aura justice et inclusion en une communauté porteuse de vie. »

Najla Kassab, présidente de la CMER, a souligné l'importance des fondements théologiques. « Il est très important d'avoir cette compréhension théologique de la raison pour laquelle nous faisons notre travail. Plus nous sommes perturbés, mieux nous agissons avec justice », a-t-elle dit.

Les membres des groupes de référence de la CMER se sont réunis au Centre de Retraite de Beit El Salam, accueillis par le Synode du Nil, pour examiner les progrès de la mise en œuvre du plan stratégique et décider des activités et projets à venir au cours des prochaines années.

Les groupes de référence feront rapport au Comité exécutif de la CMER, par l'intermédiaire du Groupe du programme du Plan stratégique, lors de sa réunion de mai en Afrique du Sud. ●

Reformed-Anglican dialogue concludes on the nature of “communion”



The International Reformed-Anglican Dialogue (IRAD) between the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Anglican Communion met for the fifth time in August in Hiroshima, Japan, under the leadership of co-chairs Elizabeth Welch (WCRC) and Howard Gregory (Anglican Communion).

This bilateral dialogue, the first that the Anglican and Reformed Communions have had globally since 1984, which then led to the report *God's Reign and Our Unity*, was mandated to take as its theme a study of the nature of *communion* (*koinonia*) and the pressing issues which emerge for both Communions out of such reflection. After meetings in India (2015), England (2016), South Africa (2017) and Canada (2018), this meeting in Japan concluded their focus on *koinonia* as God's gift and calling.

Engaging with the theme has been both exciting and challenging, report participants. The forthcoming report from the dialogue examines the foundations of *koinonia* in Scripture, theology and history, and how

it is expressed in ecclesiology and mission. They looked at what the understanding of *koinonia* is, and how *koinonia* is lived out. Wow *koinonia* helps address the diversities within and between the Communions was also explored.

Meeting in Hiroshima, participants were deeply moved to hear atomic bomb survivor Keiko Ogura share her story of 6 August 1945 and to visit the Peace Park and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

The dialogue opened with a celebration of Holy Communion in the Anglican tradition and closed with a celebration of Holy Communion in the Reformed tradition. The members of the dialogue prayed together mornings and evenings. The Commission participated in the Anglican Eucharist at the Church of the Resurrection where they were welcomed very warmly.

This round of the dialogue was generously hosted by the Anglican Communion. The hospitality of the diocese of Kobe was greatly appreciated. Greetings were brought from the Church of Christ in Japan and the Korean Christian Church in Japan. Participants were kindly

received by the Primate of the Anglican Church in Japan and the Bishop of Kobe.

The Anglican Communion was represented by Howard Gregory, Church in the Province of the West Indies; Clint Le Bruyns, Anglican Church of Southern Africa; James Hawkey, Church of England; Renta Nishihara, Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Anglican Church in Japan); Helene T. Steed, Church of Ireland; Elaine Labourel, Church of England (Diocese in Europe); Neil Vigers (co-secretary).

The WCRC was represented by Elizabeth Welch, United Reformed Church in the UK; Peter Donald, Church of Scotland; Priscille Djomhoué, United Protestant Church in Belgium; R. Gerald Hobbs, United Church of Canada; Aimee Moiso, Presbyterian Church (USA); Royce M. Victor, Church of South India; Hanns Lessing (co-secretary); C. Nolan Huizenga (Minutes)

Shintaro Ichihara, of the Anglican Church in Japan, was present as an observer. ●

Diálogo reformado-pentecostal recoge los frutos de cinco años de discusión

La sexta sesión del Diálogo reformado-pentecostal, que giró en torno a la comprensión de la „misión“, se dedicó a recoger los frutos de sus cinco años de trabajo:

- misión y salvación
- el Espíritu Santo y la misión
- misión y la unidad de la iglesia
- misión y escatología

Las conclusiones se presentarán en un único documento que se publicará el año próximo. Las personas participantes en este diálogo esperan que esta publicación sea útil para que las iglesias reformadas y pentecostales se comprendan mejor y fomenten el testimonio común, tanto en palabras como en acciones.

Para esta sesión, los y las participantes del diálogo se alojaron en el campus del Seminario Teológico de Asia Pacífico. El seminario es un ministerio conjunto de las iglesias nacionales de las Asambleas de Dios de Asia, de Oceanía del Pacífico y de las Misiones Mundiales de las Asambleas de Dios, Estados Unidos, que recibe a estudiantes de teología de toda Asia y Oceanía.

Se invitó a los y las estudiantes del seminario a conocer la riqueza de los diálogos bilaterales durante un panel de debate, que incluyó un tiempo para preguntas de los y las estudiantes. David Daniels tuvo ocasión de predicar durante un culto celebrado en la capilla. El domingo, el grupo de diálogo asistió a un culto de adoración pentecostal en la Iglesia Epicentro en Baguio, Filipinas. La noche siguiente, los y las participantes en

este diálogo disfrutaron de una cena con facultativos del seminario, organizada por el presidente del seminario, Tham Wan Yee, quien expresó un entusiasta apoyo al diálogo.

Al comienzo y al final de cada jornada, las personas participantes se reunían de manera conjunta para orar, cantar, leer y reflexionar sobre la Biblia. Este tiempo de compartir la espiritualidad y la adoración ayudó a poner en contexto los debates que tuvieron lugar y a construir una mayor comunión entre los y las participantes.

El grupo pentecostal estuvo conformado por Cecil M. Robeck, co-presidente (Asambleas de Dios, EE. UU.), David Daniels (Iglesia de Dios en Cristo, EE. UU.), Jean-Daniel Plüss (Misión pentecostal suiza) y Olga Zaprometova (Iglesia de Dios, Rusia). Teresa Chai (Asambleas de Dios, Malasia / Filipinas) y Jacqueline Gray (Iglesias cristianas australianas) no pudieron estar presentes.

El grupo reformado estuvo conformado por Karla Ann Koll, co-presidenta, (Iglesia Presbiteriana (EE. UU. / Costa Rica), Hanns Lessing (Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas, Alemania), Setri Nyomi (Iglesia Evangélica Presbiteriana en Ghana), Bas Plaisier (Iglesia Protestante en los Países Bajos), Gabriella Rácsok (Iglesia reformada de Hungría) y Nadia Marais (Iglesia reformada holandesa de Sudáfrica). Carmelo Álvarez (Discípulos de Cristo, Puerto Rico) no pudo asistir.

La reunión se desarrolló del 23 al 30 de octubre de 2019. ●



Jessica Bwali seeks to be voice to voiceless

“She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future.”

—Proverbs 31:25

“This is totally me!” says Jessica Bwali, the WCRC’s newest intern.

Bwali grew up in the United Church of Zambia and was baptized at a tender age. She participated in practically all church activities. One highlight was singing in church. She was in the Sunday school choir and, at the age of 11, joined the main praise team and became the youngest member at that time.

Bwali says Zambia being a declared Christian nation has made it easy and free for anyone to worship God wherever and whenever they want. This has brought about the mushrooming of a lot of churches, though not all for one purpose.

“Unfortunately, some of these churches are not there for genuine reasons which is preaching salvation to the people,” she says. “Instead they take advantage of people that are in desperate situations by swindling them of their hard-earned money which is quite unfortunate. However,

there are some genuine men and women of God that are really reaching out to the masses and making sure that the good news of Jesus Christ is spread far and beyond.”

As a radio journalist for over 6 years, she has advocated for human rights, looking at the many injustices that are happening in the world today. She has also used her radio shows to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. She holds girls’ rights close to her heart as she has seen how many women are abused and made to believe it is their fault.

“Being a female myself, I have seen how a lot of young girls and women are abused and unfortunately, there is no one to speak on their behalf and society tells them to ‘keep quiet!’ because you are a female,” she says. “I thought to myself if in a day I am able to speak to hundreds of people at once through radio, why not take advantage and also speak against the injustices that are directed to girls and



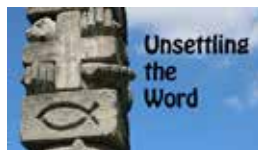
Jessica enjoys Hannover’s Christmas Market despite the cold.

also inform girls of their rights so that they can be able to defend themselves?”

Bwali’s faith in Christ drives her work as a journalist to inform the people accurately of the injustices that are going on in the world and try to find ways on how they can be fought. Through her internship with the WCRC, she hopes to gain more knowledge about justice and how she can continue to be a voice to the voiceless. She adds that she has been looking forward to returning to Germany and work for the WCRC since her participation as a steward at the 2017 General Council.

The WCRC’s internship programme is made possible through contributions by the *Evangelisches Missionswerk, Reformierte Kirchen Bern-Jura-Solothurn*, Presbyterian Church in Korea and other member churches. ●

Applications invited for GIT



Applications are now open for the 6th Global Institute of Theology (GIT) to be held 15-29 June 2020 at the Union Theological Seminary in the City of Dasmariñas, Philippines.

The GIT will offer a unique opportunity for a community of students from around the world to live and learn and do theology together in a fully inter-contextual and ecumenical way, connecting theology from the local to the regional and world levels.

The theme of this GIT will be “Unsettling the Word.” The history of the church is full of examples where the belief in the God of justice assured the excluded and exploited of their capability to resist structures of oppression. In these situations, the Christian faith is showing its unsettling potential. Theology provides the language for the re-location from the centres of power to the margins.

Learn more and get applications through this link: <http://wrc.ch/git> ●



The Work and Witness of the World Communion of Reformed Churches:

Confessing the God of life in a world fallen among thieves

Called to communion and committed to justice, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)* works 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).

As a global communion marked by discerning, confessing, witnessing and being reformed together, the WCRC strengthens and deepens unity among its member churches and coordinates common initiatives to increase its impact around the world.

Confessing in the Present Tense

The whole of creation is the “theatre of God’s glory.” This tenet of John Calvin leads the WCRC to follow both the imperatives and the approach of confessing moments as represented by the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra.

Jesus did not locate his ministry in the centres of power. He challenged the authority of political, economic, familial and religious authorities and enabled his followers to see the emerging Kingdom of God in the liberating, healing, feeding, cleansing, raising, reconciling and empowering of those who were excluded from full participation in communal life.

Bringing the resources of the Reformed theological and confessing tradition into the present tense means listening to the suffering and cries of humanity and all of creation. The WCRC takes up the prophetic traditions of public witness as a confessing communion in a world fallen among thieves (John 10:10).

* The World Communion of Reformed Churches is comprised of 100 million Christians from over 230 Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian churches in more than 105 countries.



Called to Communion, Committed to Justice



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).

Overarching Goal

By 2024, the World Communion of Reformed Churches will strive to be significantly strengthened and increasingly effective in living out God’s call to communion and commitment to justice.¹ As a global *koinonia*², we are marked by discerning, confessing³, witnessing and being reformed together.

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 (John 10:10).

As it strives to fulfil its vision, the World Communion of Reformed Churches works through two strategic trajectories:

- Strengthening and deepening the *Koinonia*.
- Growing and expanding its work for a greater global impact.

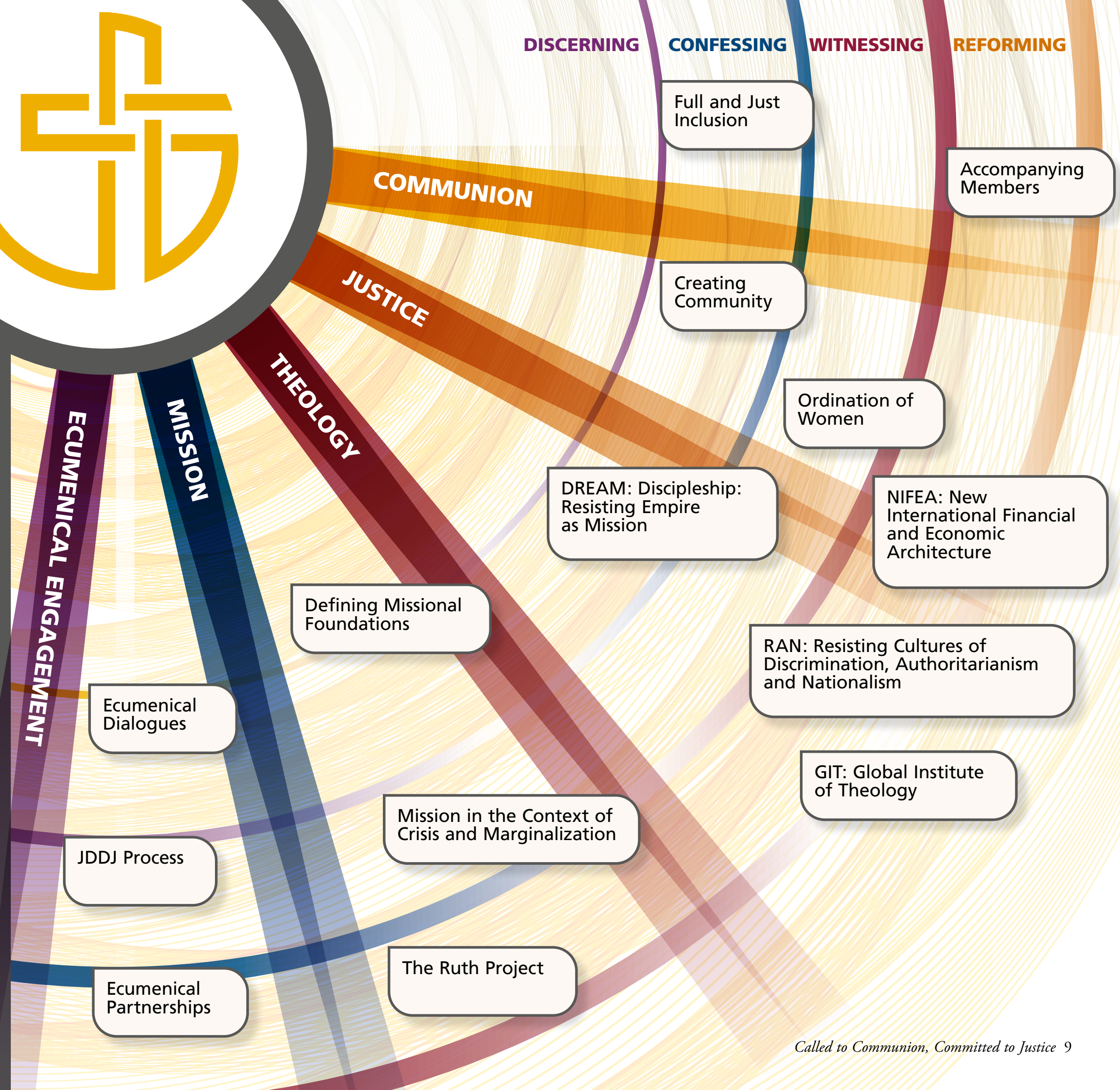
These strategic trajectories are applied through five interlocking dimensions:

- Communion
- Justice
- Theology
- Mission
- Ecumenical Engagement and Interreligious Cooperation

¹“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other (Psalm 85:10).

²The Greek word *koinonia* means joint participation in a communion, in which one has a share in anything. According to Acts 2:42 it identifies the state of fellowship and unity that should exist within the Christian congregation.

³In the spirit of the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra.



Cultivating a Just Communion

The WCRC is a global *koinonia*, marked by “discerning, confessing, witnessing and being reformed together.” This *koinonia* comes into being as a communion by the openness that allows the Holy Spirit to transform the individual, the community of believers and the world as a whole. This communion emerges from the contributions of all people of faith and therefore questions authoritarian leadership and rejects all forms of exclusion. In living out God’s calling to communion the WCRC therefore commits itself firmly to justice.

Covenanting for Justice

The WCRC seeks to do justice in the context of a world groaning in travail (Romans 8:19-24) and fallen among thieves (John 10:10), yet we continue to affirm that we are gripped with the power of the resurrection, gifted by the God of life. The Accra Confession named “empire” as that overarching system under which we live, and to which we as the church are called to resist. The primary areas that drive the justice work of the WCRC are economic justice, ecological justice, gender justice and inclusive communities.

Doing Theology for Transformation

Christians and churches all over the globe are inspired by the call to join into God’s continuous reforming of the church and transforming of the world. Engaging with the unfinished agenda of the Reformation starts with processes discerning in which the voices of wounded communities receive special attention because in their cries the WCRC hears the words of the crucified God. This engagement leads into processes of confessing the faith to which theology is called to provide language to address the present reality, drawing on the Reformed traditions and contextual theologies.

Engaging God’s Mission in a Context of Crisis

In responding to the call to communion and in affirming the commitment to justice the WCRC becomes part of God’s mission (*mission dei*) to renew the whole creation. God’s mission transforms the church into a missional communion that commits itself to God’s work of renewal and transformation. In this mission the WCRC collaborates with all people of good will inside and outside of the church, committing itself to participate in liberating discipleship.

Working with All the Partners God Provides

The WCRC believes “to be Reformed is to be ecumenical.” The Reformed understanding of the church therefore transcends the boundaries of any particular church. Reformed theology sees that God is at work also in other Christian traditions and understands that the unity of the church to which the Apostolic Creed testifies is already there. God gives unity as a gift and invites the church to receive this by reforming itself and its relationships to Christians of other traditions.

GEM School: Building God’s vision of life-in-fullness for all creation

“God’s vision of life-in-fullness for all creation, not just human beings, has never been more threatened than today,” said Seong Won Park of the Gyeongseong Theological Seminary in the opening panel of the annual Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management for an Economy of Life (GEM School) held in Indonesia in August.

Park emphasized how climate change and the 4th industrial revolution are now converging with the ongoing global economic crisis and aggravating socio-economic inequalities and insecurity for an ever-growing number of people.

During the opening panel on “Putting Economic Justice at the Heart of Faith,” Septemmy Lakawa, president of the Jakarta Theological Seminary, said, “In response, we people of faith continue to envision an economy of life that is also an economy of ‘enough.’ Enough in the sense of providing sufficiently for the basic needs of all people, but also enough in the sense of saying ‘no’ to an economic system based on accumulation that excludes and harms the most vulnerable.”

Lakawa added, “Identifying and standing with the most vulnerable is a political choice. It is also a faith choice. We cannot separate the two.”



GEM School is a space for learning—including from each other—why and how to advocate for urgently needed transformations in the financial and economic architecture by exploring new economic concepts and exchanging tools, languages, and models.

As part of the contextualizing and relearning what and for whom the economy and economics ought to be, GEM School participants visited a community of scavengers living along busy railway lines in the centre of Jakarta, a rapidly growing metropolis where numerous modern skyscrapers are under construction. Beneath a tarp, some of the participants helped to distribute food packages to around 300 women, men and children as trains whizzed past.

“I realize how much privilege I have,” said Renate Marique, a participant from the Netherlands. “I do not have to queue or rely on someone’s generosity for my lunch. I have clean water and a roof over my head.”

“No doubt this is a structural problem that entails a structural response,” said Antonio Teles da Silva, a participant from Brazil. “But compassion is a first step.”

Jointly convened by the Council for World Mission, World Council of Churches and World Communion of Reformed Churches and hosted by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, GEM School 2019 gathered 20 participants representing 16 countries from around the world.

“Building an economy of life is a key pillar of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,” said Isabel Apawo Phiri, deputy general secretary of the WCC. “We hope GEM School will empower participants to act, lobby for change and even influence socio-economic policymaking.”

—Lena Cruchley



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Northeast Asian youth learn from each other



Young adults from around northeast Asia gathered in Seoul, South Korea, in late October for the first Youth Leadership Empowerment conference.

Sponsored by the Northeast Asia Area Council (NEAAC), the four-day meeting was designed to introduce NEAAC and the World Communion of Reformed Churches to the young leaders, provide them with a space to share and learn from each other and empower them to work more closely together on issues that impact them all.

“As members of Reformed churches, social participation is very important,” said Lian Chin-Siong, NEAAC convener and ecumenical officer of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. “Although we come from different countries, we are all influenced by the politics of the United States and China in political, church and social issues.”

Representatives from each of the churches in attendance reported on the issues they encountered in their contexts:

The Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China representative reported on the current unrest there, feelings of injustice and a loss of hope for the future.

The Japanese Christian Church representative said the number of Christians was decreasing, including those seeking to become ministers, and that discrimination against minorities was an issue.

The Presbyterian Church in Korea representative sited reunification between North and South and the related concerns of human rights, poverty and militarization. The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea representative noted the issue of youth poverty.

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan representative reported on the destruction of Indigenous culture along with other social and political issues, including a widening gap between generations.

Taking these and other expressed concerns as a whole, the attendees wrote a common prayer which they released to the public at the conclusion of their gathering, which concludes, “Let us try to overcome the difficulties

and share our vision, as well as prayers with each others and our local churches, to create a brighter future.”

The whole prayer can be found on the WCRC website.

Given the success of this first Youth Leadership Empowerment gathering, Chin-Siong looks forward to holding it in other countries on a regular basis. ●

Tulbus Isinkaunan contributed to this report.

Forum established to promote peace in Cameroon

The Ecumenical Forum on the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon was formed in early September to address the deteriorating situation affecting the anglophone communities and regions in Cameroon and to explore ways of constructive justice and peace there.

On invitation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), representatives of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the All African Conference of Churches (AACC), the African Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC), Basel Mission German Branch, Mission 21, the Presbyterian Church (USA) Presbyterian Mission and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) met with representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC).

The participants:

- listened to reports about the historic and increasing marginalization of the anglophone population;
- heard about severe violations of human rights committed by Cameroonian security forces and armed fighters struggling for the national independence of the anglophone regions;
- were told about the closing of hospitals and schools

- engaged with the situation of more than 500,000 of internally displaced persons.

In response, the Ecumenical Forum on the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon was established. In cooperation with churches, church agencies and civil society organizations, the Forum will address the causes of the anglophone crisis and work towards negotiated solutions in the Cameroonian national context. The WCC and PCC will convene the forum. Churches that strive for a constructive solution of the anglophone crisis in Cameroon in the spirit of justice and peace are invited to join.

The Forum will be active in the following fields:

1. providing accurate information about the Anglophone crisis and about peace and justice initiatives that aim at constructive solutions;
2. undertaking international, regional and national advocacy for negotiated solutions;
3. peace building;
4. accompanying of the affected population and the churches. ●

WCRC mourns death of prophetic theologian



The World Communion of Reformed Churches mourns the passing away of Vuyani Vellem on 4 December in his home country of South Africa after a struggle with cancer.

Vellem, a professor at Pretoria University, was a specialist in liberation theology,

focusing his research on themes such as Christianity and democracy and Christianity and economics as well as fields such as ecclesiology, spiritualities and public and liberation theologies.

“We have indeed lost a prophet of the Reformed faith,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary. “He was well known for his passion and commitment, giving himself wholly and lovingly to all who knew him.”

A powerful, prophetic voice for black theology and for the cause of marginalized communities around the world, he “stood for justice at all times,” said Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness. “He pledged his solidarity with the wounded and in the recent history of South Africa enabled students and oth-

ers to make sense of their struggles to link them with marginalized and vulnerable people and God’s earth.”

Vellem was a well-known and well-loved church leader. An ordained pastor in the United Presbyterian Church of South Africa, he also served his church as its general secretary. He was active in the ecumenical movement in various capacities with the Council for World Mission, South African Council of Churches and World Council of Churches.

He was an invaluable resource to the WCRC, co-moderating the Theology and Communion Programme Reference Group.

“We are shocked with the news of the loss of a great man. His contribution, insights and commitment to the WCRC will be greatly missed,” said Najla Kassab, WCRC president. “We lost him too early with much unfinished business together on our journey towards justice. May the Lord prepare leaders who will continue the journey.”

Vellem is survived by his wife, Phuzema, and his two children, Vovo and Philly. Please remember his family, friends and colleagues in your prayers. ●

Declaration of Climate Emergency

The Lord God took the human and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. —Genesis 2:15

Moses adds, that the custody of the garden was given in charge to Adam, to show that we possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on the condition, that being content with a frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain. Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits to be marred or ruined by neglect. Moreover, that this economy, and this diligence, with respect to those good things which God has given us to enjoy, may flourish among us; let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.

—John Calvin, Commentary on Genesis 2:15

We are in the midst of a climate crisis. The planet's surface temperature has risen by about one degree Celsius since the late 19th century. Most of this warming has taken place in the last thirty-five years with the last five years being the warmest years on record. This has resulted in the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets decreasing in mass as well as clearly noticeable glacial retreats across the globe. Sea levels have risen about 8 inches with islands in the Pacific threatening to go under sea levels in the very near future.

There is clear consensus that this climate crisis is the result of human activity. It is the clear outcome of a global economic system that has placed profit over life and plundered the Earth. An economic system that has indulged the myth of unlimited growth has sought the exploitation of life as a means to the accumulation of wealth for the few through conquest, competition and chaos. In the Accra Confession (2004) the WCRC already declared: "Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism ... which defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political and military empire which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule."

At the 2017 General Council, a decision was made to write to the G20 nations calling for adherence to the Paris agreement. The General Council in its statement lamented that "our destructive changes to the environment leave us in a teetering world where both drought and flood result in human climate refugees and extinctions of species."

A clear discernment of the signs of the times requires us to join in the call to declare a climate emergency. This is a call to repentance and a turning away from our death dealing ways and to a covenant for justice with the economy and the earth.

There is a need for radical and immediate action to start on our journey to resolve this climate emergency.

The truth is that we are facing a human created crisis with catastrophic consequences both economically and environmentally. An emergency of this nature requires radical change and urgent steps to salvage what is left of the earth.

We call on our member churches and the wider ecumenical community to:

- Educate your congregations and communities and advocate for the care of God's creation through worship, study and ecumenical and systemically transformative political activism on the basis of the agreed rejection of imperial capitalism.
- To advocate and encourage sustainable living
- Use the occasion of the Season of Creation (September 1 to October 4) to enter into a time of discernment, confession, witness and reformation over issues of Climate Crisis
- Join our inter-ecumenical initiative for a New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) that addresses the climate issue in the following years: 2019 will seek to address Inequality and Climate Change through addressing taxation and reparation, 2021 will address De-Growth Challenges and Spiritualities through addressing lifestyles and alternatives.
- Support and invest in renewable energy and other measures to combat climate change.
- Advocate for an end to global greenhouse emissions and move towards reaching net-zero carbon emissions
- Share resources and actions that are directed towards an economy of life and sustainable ecological life

Address the challenges of inequality, poverty, war and conflict, water, food security and famine through specifically working with Climate migrants, advocating with national governments to end war, militarization and military spending and joining the Zacchaeus Campaign that calls for just taxation to address inequality and ecological debt.

The Time to act is NOW! ●

News from around the Communion



An **expert group of Indigenous leaders and theologians** gathered at the WCRC offices in Hannover in late October to plan the Communion's work to engage with Indigenous people on a wide variety of issues. ●



General Secretary Chris Ferguson represented the Communion at the **10th International Consultation of Churches Witnessing With Migrants**, held in early November in Quito, Ecuador. He spoke about living in an age of empire, the prophetic call of the Accra Confession and how we must side with the marginalized—especially including migrants—confessing the God of life in a world fallen among thieves (John 10:10). Other Communion members were also in attendance, showing strong support in taking up this year's theme of "Moral and Ethical Imperatives of Sustainable Human Mobility." ●



During its November meeting, WCRC officers gathered with staff to join in the **#ThursdaysInBlack campaign**, an ecumenical effort that strives for a world without rape and violence. ●



WCRC Europe held a consultation in late October under the title "**Newspaper and Bible: Confessing Christ in Europe Today.**" It focused on Karl Barth's theology, in which the political is always an important element of every theological endeavour and judgement. Taking its lead from Barth himself, the consultation addressed issues such as the living conditions of many in society, political and religious responses to growing religious pluralism in Europe and other potential causes of conflict. The conference was held in Budapest, Hungary, and saw attendees gather from across Europe for two days of keynote addresses, discussions and working groups. ●



Chris Ferguson

From the General Secretary

And a little child shall lead them

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.
—Isaiah 11:1-6

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World
Communion
of Reformed
Churches

Called to
Communion,
Committed to
Justice

This year around the world we are all caught up in the true raw biblical meaning of advent. Not a gentle, expectant, prepared waiting for some inevitable good news that we must make space for in our crowded lives but rather a desperate sense of being overwhelmed by the weight of the world. For most people and for the planet itself the social, political, economic, cultural and religious realities are at best unsettling and in fact distressing.

The prophetic imagination is enflamed not with promises of cheap grace and guaranteed outcomes but with a call to look elsewhere for hope. An invitation to see the present not in terms of a ready-made, better situation but as opportunity to see that God is offering possibilities in exactly the opposite places to that of the powerful rules. Isaiah is not only foretelling what we already know about Jesus but also about how God works in our present times. Prophecy is as much as discerning God's actions in the present as it is about the future.

God is at work not in the strong, powerful, dominant places. The green bud of hope comes from an infertile dry stump, not a robust tree. It comes from lives already shattered and put down. A shoot from a stump. Look around. Discern, detect. Where and who have been decimated and desiccated and there expect a surprise. Not shaped by what we see or hear as possibilities but by irrepressible justice.

Hostile and opposing creatures find harmony and join forces, not tamed by the mighty but led by a little child. It is hard not to absorb Isaiah's prophetic vision when we see all the ravages of oppression, suffering and destruction and yet from very unexpected places opposing forces are being led by children. Jesus but in our own time and place, from places with little hope shoots of new life appear.

Greta Thunberg and school children are leading the global environmental movement. From Hong Kong to Beirut to Chile and involving more than nine popular youth-led protests reject the current political class in favour of the politics of life and justice.

Isaiah tells us where the spirit, the spirit of God, the spirit of Jesus is to be found in a desperate time. Among the brutalized and ignored. The children are among those filled with the spirit of wisdom and understanding. The spirit of the fear and knowledge of the God of Life.

In the advent moment from the expectant voices of children we hear the call to join the Jesus movement. To save, to rescue life where it is at risk. Advent helps remember where to look to see God at work.

For a child will lead them. ●