

Reformed communiqué

Articles in Bahasa Indonesia, English, French, German and Spanish

APRIL 2020

La pandémie modifie les méthodes de travail de la CMER et de ses membres

« On t'a fait connaître, homme, ce qui est bien et ce que l'Éternel demande de toi: c'est que tu mettes en pratique le droit, que tu aimes la bonté et que tu marches humblement avec ton Dieu. »
— Michée 6:8 (Segond 21)



Dans cette situation sans précédent et en rapide évolution, la Communion mondiale d'Églises réformées (CMER) tient ses engagements en tant que *Koinonia* mondiale marquée par le discernement, la confession, le témoignage et la réforme commune. Vivre l'appel que Dieu nous adresse en tant que famille chrétienne mondiale «appelée à la communion, engagée dans la justice» nous conduit d'abord à nous tourner vers Dieu qui est notre espérance et notre fondement.

« La pandémie du coronavirus touche le monde entier, et nous sommes tous touchés par son impact, » dit une lettre de la présidente Najla Kassab et du secrétaire général Chris Ferguson adressée à toutes les églises membres de la CMER. « Nos églises et nos organismes régionaux répondent aux besoins de leurs membres, tant spirituellement que physiquement, et cherchent à coopérer avec les mesures

énergiques prises pour ralentir la propagation du virus afin de mieux prendre soin des personnes atteintes. »

« Il est navrant de constater que les réunions de culte ont été suspendues dans de nombreux endroits et néanmoins encourageant que tant de personnes cherchent des moyens d'être fidèles à l'amour de Dieu et du prochain, même en restant chez elles et en limitant leurs déplacements et leurs contacts sociaux, » constate la lettre.

Des centaines de communautés dans les églises membres sont passées à des services de culte en ligne, en utilisant des outils tels que Facebook live, Zoom et YouTube. Le Conseil de la zone Caraïbes et Amérique du Nord (CANAAC) a mis en ligne sur son site web (canaac.wcrc.ch) une page contenant des conseils des églises membres, tandis que le bulletin hebdomadaire de la CMER intitulé « Member Churches News » a

publié des dizaines d'articles au cours des dernières semaines.

Bien entendu, les conditions ne sont plus réunies pour permettre au Comité exécutif de la CMER de se réunir en Afrique du Sud pour sa réunion annuelle en mai. En raison de cette situation toujours imprévisible, il est également difficile de fixer une date pour une réunion en 2020.

Les églises hôtes sud-africaines ont indiqué qu'elles accueilleraient volontiers le Comité exécutif en mai 2021, et des projets sont déjà en cours dans ce sens. Les responsables de la CMER ont prévu une réunion en novembre, et tenteront de se rencontrer en face à face à une date plus rapprochée si possible. Ils continueront également à se réunir régulièrement de manière virtuelle, en restant en contact étroit avec le secrétariat général. Le travail programmatique et administratif de la CMER se

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WCRC members respond

Member churches are responding to the pandemic.

Here are but a few stories (more can be found online at wcrc.ch/blog).

Chaplains are on the front lines

As the world trembles in fear because of the COVID-19 virus, Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) chaplains are on the front lines in hospitals, clinics and hospice-care centers.

Also during this time, chaplains are serving in the military and in many businesses.

“Our chaplains are specially trained, called, and ordained by the church, and sent by Jesus Christ to provide spiritual care to people in pain or in spiritual distress,” said Sarah Roelofs, director of the CRC’s Chaplaincy and Care office.

“We have answered the call to minister in places and locations that are unsafe because we have been equipped and trained. The spiritual need is great. ...We encounter and minister to people who are isolated from God and others as they struggle emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. We seek to provide care that encompasses all of the dimensions of wellness.”

Currently, Roelofs said, many chaplains are seeing the heartbreaking and disastrous effects of COVID-19 in their communities. “They are experiencing firsthand the immense strain on the already stressed medical system. Staffing in hospitals is lower as staff members must self-quarantine,” she said.

Adding to their work, many chaplains also serve on hospital ethics committees that are discussing how best to use health-care resources when, as many news outlets are reporting, rationing of these resources becomes necessary. This can involve agonizing decisions about

choosing which patients to treat aggressively and which ones not to.

“Chaplains bring unique expertise to an ethics committee. Chaplains are trained to see the work of God in all circumstances,” said Roelofs. “When they sit on an ethics committee, they broaden the picture.”

In recent days, Roelofs has been receiving stories from the field, giving insight into the challenges chaplains are now facing. These stories portray some of the hardships involved in working in hospitals that are urgently trying to navigate the virus crisis. They also speak of habits and practices that keep them close to God as they work in the military and in various other settings.

Here are a few of those stories:

Karen Norris, chaplain at Stollery Children’s Hospital, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

“In dealing with COVID-19, my province went from our first unconfirmed case to 22/23 confirmed cases in a week. Two of my six colleagues are in self-isolation for 14 days, one for COVID-like symptoms and another due to returning from another country. So one-third of our team is missing. ...A family I’ve followed as an inpatient for nine months gave me a hug on discharge day, and I internally winced. Then, as I was visiting with a newer family, they acknowledged their fear of the virus getting into the hospital, and I realized I was sitting close to them and that that might have made them uncomfortable. I want to do my job, but I also want to keep patients safe. Because I had a scratchy throat, I did not visit patients yesterday. I am feel-

ing fine today, though. Should I have dinner with friends? What if I pick the virus up at work and bring it to friends? And vice versa. I’m sure I’m not the only one hearing and facing these questions daily, so I just wanted to share and offer up a prayer for all of us—for compassionate presence, for wise decisions, for health and safety in these challenging times.”

Lloyd Wicker, U.S. Navy chaplain, Naval Air Station, Sigonella, Italy

“Please continue to pray for Italy. Three weeks ago we had three cases. Today we have just under 54,000. Just today we added nearly 6,557 newly confirmed cases (793 died today). Most of the dead are elderly. Hospitals are overwhelmed and forced to turn away patients they deem less likely to survive so that they can use their limited resources on those they think they can save. As a friend of mine said, ‘It may seem like no big deal until it’s your parents or grandparents getting turned away at the hospital.’ A week ago I was one who leaned ignorantly toward the notion that ‘This is just a bad flu’—clearly that is not our reality. Being slow to act has had a great cost. This is by no means a call to panic...but it certainly is a call to PRAY. Clearing out your grocery store doesn’t make a lot of sense... but it would be a good time to stop diminishing the situation and complaining about the inconveniences of events being canceled. Nothing should make you happier than being able to look back someday and say your leaders overreacted by imposing safety measures.”

Albert Kae, substance-abuse program chaplain, Los Angeles (California, USA) Union Mission

“Our mission is very busy right now because we are the only mission open here on skid row. The most vulnerable of people are right outside our doors. How can we turn them away? Fortunately we have a public health clinic inside the mission that can respond to them. A lot of the counseling I have with those living on the addiction

unit now has to take place over the phone or computer. I also need to check in with people who work for me, and I need to listen to and pray for them. The role of the chaplain is to be calm in a very anxious time. I know the virus is here at the mission, but I take precautions. When I go home at night, I wash my clothes and take a shower before I go in to greet my wife.” ●

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

Presbyterian Church of Ghana provides support for coronavirus medical team

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) has decided to provide lunch every day for one hundred medical staff working at the three designated health centres managing coronavirus/COVID-19 cases in the country.

The health centres are the Greater Accra Regional Hospital (Ridge Hospital) Tema General Hospital, and the Ga East Government Hospital.

The intervention by the PCG is aimed at supporting the government’s efforts to control and manage the spread of the virus in Ghana, which has recorded 68 cases and two deaths.

The moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Joseph Obiri Yeboah Mante presented the first lunch on behalf of the PCG to the medical staff at the Ridge Hospital in Accra.

He also presented 30 boxes of Salem Mineral Water produced by the PCG and 30 cartons of soft drinks to the medical staff.

The items were received by the Greater Accra Regional Director of Health Services, Charity Sarpong, during a brief ceremony in Accra.

Mante said the church has recognized the invaluable contributions of the medical staff working hard to ensure that the coronavirus does not spread; hence the decision to provide them with lunch to motivate them to continue to work for the nation.

He also said the PCG, which is one of the largest denominations in the country, has been following the challenges confronting the nation in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The moderator urged all and sundry to adhere to the recommended safety measures put in place by the Ghana Health Service and other health experts.

Sarpong thanked the PCG for the timely gesture and said it would go a long way to motivate the health workers.

She also assured the church that they would continue to work hard to ensure that the virus does not spread and those who have already contracted the virus would also be well managed so as to recover.

She urged other institutions and organizations to come and support in diverse ways to make the fight against the spread of the virus successful. ●

—George Larbi, *Presbyterian Church of Ghana*

La pandémie modifie:

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poursuit, mais aussi sous forme électronique.

« Alors même que ce monde, déjà tombé entre les mains des voleurs, est en pleine période de perturbation marquée par une pandémie en progression, la CMER comprend que Dieu est à l’œuvre et que nous devons être fidèles à son appel, » exprime la lettre.

« Nous devons être particulièrement vigilants en cette période de crise pour protéger les pauvres et les faibles, pour promouvoir la cause de la justice et veiller à ce que l’injustice ne soit pas commise. »

La CMER fait ceci parce que nous « croyons que Dieu est un Dieu de justice. Dans un monde de corruption, d’exploitation et d’avidité, Dieu est d’une manière particulière le Dieu des indigents, des pauvres, des exploités, des injustes et des maltraités (Psaume 146, 7-9) » comme le souligne la Confession d’Accra.

« Nous devrions tous comprendre que nous ne faisons pas cela seuls, mais avec l’aide de Dieu et le soutien de toute la Communion. Nous devons nous soutenir mutuellement dans la prière et accroître nos efforts pour être en contact les uns avec les autres, par une communication forte et le partage des défis et des besoins - ainsi que de l’inspiration, » dit la lettre. « Restons tous en contact étroit, nous soutenant mutuellement dans la prière et l’action et en servant les autres pour la gloire de Dieu. » ●

Parking lot church

First Presbyterian Church of Verona, New Jersey, worshiped drive-in style on Sunday

As she pondered how to lead worship while keeping the safety of congregants who may be affected by COVID-19 uppermost in her mind, Lynn Rubier-Capron remembered her childhood, when she used to see movies at the drive-in.

Would that model work for the 50-60 people who normally worship at the 126-year-old First Presbyterian Church of Verona, New Jersey, USA?

It turns out it worked quite well.

On Sunday, 15 March, about a dozen cars pulled into the church parking lot as they normally would on a Sunday morning. But this time, drivers and passengers stayed in their vehicles and cracked a window as they prepared their hearts and minds to worship God.

Rubier-Capron and the worship team used a portable microphone and speaker to reach worshippers seat-

ed in their vehicles. The pastor, who played classical violin in her previous career, accompanied a pair of singers in hymns.

“On Sunday morning, I had the sense that congregants were excited,” said Rubier-Capron. “Some unexpected people came. One is in the at-risk population. She was devastated when she heard we wouldn’t have church” in the sanctuary.

Liz Hathaway, First Presbyterian Church’s education facilitator, live-streamed worship after having spread the word about parking lot church via social media beforehand. Worshipers passed the peace by simply rolling their car windows down a bit more to wave to their neighbors.

Rubier-Capron credited Hathaway’s insight and creativity for making the church’s initial foray into parking lot worship successful. “She was thinking of drive-through church and texted me with the idea.

She didn’t know that I was trying to imagine something like a drive-in church, though I was stuck on the technology question of how to get sound into the cars,” Rubier-Capron said. Hathaway’s encouragement “helped me step into the idea and look for solutions.”

Rubier-Capron preached on a familiar epistle passage— 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, “The Gift of Love,” which Paul concludes by mentioning faith, hope and love.

On faith, Rubier-Capron told worshippers this: “When we name our fear we discover that is not the whole of who we are. The challenge we face is real. But suddenly we have access again to a large perspective,” faith in the “God who created us, God who redeems us and God who sustains us.”

On hope, she discussed the walk in the park she’d taken the day before as a break from sermon preparation. “I walk in the park a lot,” she said. “For the first time, I saw entire families out walking with the children and their pets together. This enlivened my hope—God is redeeming all things and God will redeem this situation as well. I have already seen signs of it, like (Saturday) in the park.”

Then there’s love: “We are social distancing as an act of love,” she said, “love for our neighbour, whom we don’t want to become ill; love of ourselves; and love of our society, which needs time to shore up our medical responses to the unique coronavirus.”

“We think it’s meaningful to this community that they know their church is still here,” Rubier-Capron said. “We are willing to sacrifice not being in the sanctuary together if it means we will help flatten the curve.” ●

—Mike Ferguson,
Presbyterian News Service

Taiwan effectively addresses virus

Excluded from the World Health Organization and having learned hard lessons from past epidemics that originated in China, the Taiwanese government responded quickly to the rise of COVID-19 and is now seen as an effective example in containing the virus.

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT) did its part by following guidelines from the Taiwan Center for Disease Control.

The PCT suspended the work of churches in shared buildings and severely restricted the activities and numbers able to gather in independent buildings. Face-to-face Easter services were suspended entirely and many churches moved to online worship.

Worship services were streamlined, eliminating choirs, shortening hymns and inviting members to put their offerings in bags by themselves. Doors and windows were fully opened during services and seating staggered and limited to no more than 100 people, all of whom were tested for temperatures upon entering, given hand sanitizer and required to wear masks. As able and necessary, churches also distributed sanitizers and masks to their members. Instead of handshakes, greetings were exchanged with a nod.

“What Taiwan has done might appear to be foresight, but it is simply applying the famous dictum of public health—prevention is better than cure—in its literal sense,” said a PCT member.

Uniting in adversity

Uniting Churches around the Australia either closed their doors or held limited worship from Sunday, 22 March, as they adapted to life in the global coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.

Australian people, governments, companies and institutions have struggled through a tumultuous and occasionally chaotic few weeks, during which the virus has continued to spread locally, sparking panic buying in supermarkets.

Football matches are now playing to empty stadiums, live entertainment productions are all being cancelled, as are major events like Sydney's Royal Easter Show and ANZAC Day services.

For churches, many practical and pastoral challenges lie ahead, not the least of which are the expected toll of the virus, particularly among older Australians, and the economic hardship borne of the containment measures.

"Now, more than ever, as followers of Jesus, we are called to embody God's love and compassion in our world," said Uniting Church in Australia President Deidre Palmer in a pastoral letter to the church.

In a time when many Australians are feeling frightened and alone, Palmer and other Uniting Church leaders are urging members to respond compassionately and creatively to the changed circumstances.

"As members of the wider community, and as the body of Christ called to exercise love for our neighbours, we are committed to participating in our society in wise, faithful and responsible manner," said David Baker, moderator of the Synod of Queensland.

"We have our part to play both in limiting the spread of the disease itself, and in helping our wider community learn new ways of caring for

one another in a time of emotional, physical and financial stress," said Baker.

New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory (NSW/ACT) Moderator Simon Hansford and General Secretary Jane Fry wrote to presbyteries and congregations with a "very strong recommendation" that congregations should not be meeting in person in any gathering.

"We note the clear advice that has been provided by government health authorities, about the importance of acting early for the benefit of the whole society," said the NSW/ACT leadership team.

"Early action will minimize the likelihood of becoming infected, slow the rate at which the virus spreads, flatten the curve of the incidence of serious cases, and assist the medical and hospital systems in responding to seriously increased demands. Our commitment to the common good mandates that we proceed in this direction."

The advice to cancel worship was taken on the same day the Federal Government announced new guidelines for public gatherings, limiting indoor meetings to less than 100 and outdoor meetings to less than 500. On 20 March, the Federal Government increased this recommendation for social distancing for indoor gatherings to **four square metres per person**.

The Synods of Victoria and Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Synod have indicated that Congregations can proceed with worship services and gathered activities with strict hygiene measures and social distancing, working within state and federal government guidelines.

Some congregations within these Synods have moved to cancel their worship services and other activities in response to local circumstances.

Looking Ahead

The president and synod moderators will meet via videoconference to reflect on the life of the Uniting Church and review the pastoral challenges ahead.

Palmer is urging Uniting Church members to get in touch directly.

"I invite you to send through to us, your requests for prayer, your stories of hope, the particular challenges you are facing in your regions, so that we can focus our time together and pastorally support you, as you faithfully serve Christ through the life and witness of the Uniting Church across Australia," said Palmer.

"I am very conscious that many of you continue to be deeply affected by drought, the aftermath of bushfires and flooding, as well as the impacts of the global pandemic.

"The ways we celebrate Easter will be significantly affected, and you will know the best ways for your local communities to observe Easter.

"The message of Easter speaks into all of our contexts. God's grace poured out into our world, through the Risen Christ brings hope and love into the deepest corners of despair and suffering, and brings transformation and new life, through the steadfast love of God for every one and the whole creation.

"May God sustain you with love and strength, as you serve Christ in these rapidly changing and challenging times," said Palmer. ●

—*United Church in Australia*

WCRC Europe calls for prayers and encouragement

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In these days we are experiencing great uncertainty. The fight against the spread of the Coronavirus requires measures which have great affects on our daily life. The public life of many European countries is standing still. Experts want us to avoid our social contacts and we are all affected by the consequences of the Coronavirus.

As the Steering Committee of WCRC Europe, we call you to pray for those who are suffering from the situation especially the sick persons and their families. Let us also pray for those whose health puts them at higher risk and for those who are facing major changes in their lives.

In this crisis it is important to remember that we are not alone, and with Christ we have the power to stay strong:

“For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of sound mind.”

With this confidence we are able to accept the challenge of our current situation and search for ways to help those who are extremely affected. As we see already in some European countries, we can build a community without direct contact and we can look for a common spirit of hope and practical ideas of creativity to overcome this crisis.

Even as the Coronavirus crisis is escalating, we must not forget about the refugees in Europe, especially those who are in Greece. A few weeks ago, the President of the European region of WCRC, Martina Wasserloos, the Treasurer, Kerstin Koch and the Vice President, Dimitris Boukis visited Athens and the Greek islands of Lesbos and Chios seeing people suffering from the current situation. On the islands, children, women and men live in terrible conditions. Often, they don't have water or electricity, and the eminent danger of the coming epidemic is extremely high. The refugees are waiting for a solution for their situation. All the while the citizens of the Greek

islands are overwhelmed with the current situation and are expecting assistance from the European Union, including a political solution. We saw a Europe full of selfishness and violence in its politics and not the Europe of peace, we are committed to.

In Athens, we visited “Faros,” the center for the accommodation and education of unaccompanied refugee teenagers, which WCRC Europe had supported with educational funds. We experienced both the passion of their personnel and their hopeful anticipation for the positive impact this experience had on the more than 60 beneficiaries so far. We realized that there was an imminent need for more similar centers and learning projects for the “unseen generation” of the unaccompanied refugee teens.

During our time visiting these centers we truly saw that God was beside those who were suffering. In Athens, Lesbos and Chios we could recognize in the face of the refugees the image of our living God. He comes from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and other countries.

As Christians, we have to raise our voices for the people who are suffering and those who are forgotten behind our own challenges. We have to raise our voices as well for those who become victims of political machinations. Please do not forget those who are suffering.

Therefore we call you—even in times of uncertainty—to urge your governments to search for a solution for the refugees in Greece.

We encourage European churches to take up their calling as ambassadors of Christ, to raise their voices in unity, friendship and solidarity to those in need and never resting in our pursuit towards a peaceful humanity.

As we trust in God, the creator of all humanity, in Jesus Christ, who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit, who broadens our horizons. ●

—The Steering Committee
of WCRC Europe, 17 March 2020

Libertad religiosa basada en la justicia

Una consulta realizada reciente propuso valiosas medidas para encontrar un paradigma de pensamiento fiel sobre el tema de “Libertad religiosa o de creencia”.

Veintidós líderes y lideresas eclesiales y teólogos y teólogas se reunieron en la localidad de Hattersheim am Main, Alemania, del 25 al 27 de febrero, para debatir este tema a la luz del aumento global de etno-nacionalismos, la xenofobia, la intolerancia interreligiosa, la hegemonía patriarcal y el racismo.

“Dado el aumento actual de etno-nacionalismos que usan la religión como marcadores de identidad y para legitimar la violencia, es imperativo que nosotros, como personas de fe, podamos apoyar la libertad de religión y trabajar por un mundo en el que todas las personas de fe tengan la libertad de expresión, articulación y propagación de su fe”, dijo Philip Vinod Peacock, secretario ejecutivo de justicia y testimonio de la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas.

“La violación del derecho a la libertad religiosa o de creencias, especialmente de las personas más vulnerables, por parte de los actuales nacionalismos populistas que han cooptado solapadamente la premisa moral de la protección de la libertad religiosa para sus propias agendas individuales, evidencia uno de las heridas morales más dolorosas y paradójicas de nuestros tiempos”, afirmó Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar, coordinador del programa para el diálogo interreligioso y la cooperación del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias.

Las contribuciones oficiales a la consulta fueron presentadas de diversas maneras con discursos de apertura de Heiner Bielefeldt, Lesmore Ezekiel y Heidi Hadsel; estudios bíblicos de Mitri Raheb, Septemmy Lankawa y Dianna Wright; y perspectivas regionales por parte de Peggy Kabonde, Joas Adiprasetya,



Farhana Nazir, Junaid Ahmed, Eve Parker, Odor Balazs, HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Anna Case Winters y Abraham Mathew.

En la declaración final de la consulta se “reconoció que el clima global actual requiere la cooperación interreligiosa y la construcción de alianzas comprometidas con un mundo basado en la justicia y la libertad” y que “el tema de la libertad religiosa debe ubicarse al abordar la cuestión de la justicia”.

“Como un intelectual público musulmán comprometido con el diálogo interreligioso por la paz y la justicia, no he participado de un foro que me pareciera más hospitalario y receptivo al trabajo interreligioso que éste en el que estamos involucrados e involucradas aquí”, expresó Junaid Ahmad, profesor de religión y política mundial en la Universidad Nacional Defensa (Pakistán).

“Escuchar y relacionarse con teólogos y teólogas de raíz cristiana, activistas y líderes de opinión fue una experiencia extraordinaria, justamente por las posibilidades que ofrece en un mundo cada vez más fragmentado por las ideologías (‘fundamentalismos’, tanto en su variedad religiosa como secular) que buscan promover las formas más peligrosas de autoritarismo, xenofobia y racismo, incluida la más alarmante de nuestro tiempo: la islamofobia”, continuó Ahmad.

Recordando la afirmación de Juan Calvin de que “todos los seres humanos tienen una dignidad inher-

ente dada por Dios, lo que significa que nuestros derechos están arraigados en Dios”, la consulta declaró: “Por lo tanto, no podemos hablar sobre libertad religiosa sin hablar de la justicia y de la dignidad de todos los seres humanos”.

La declaración continuó con una condena enérgica de todas las formas de discriminación religiosa, opresión y persecución. “Estamos llamados y llamadas a asumir una teología valiente, que sepa arriesgarse, y una hospitalidad mutua y radical. Para esto, podemos buscar ejemplos de cooperación y apoyo religioso incluso en medio de la violencia religiosa. Reconocemos que solamente una comunidad con imaginación interreligiosa puede desafiar los conceptos nacionalistas de religiosidad intolerante que niegan la dignidad y las libertades religiosas de las personas vulnerables. Hacemos un llamamiento a una teología vivida de resistencia, restauración y reconciliación”.

“La relevancia y oportuna realización de este encuentro se basa en su visión de confrontar tales perversiones abusivas, explorando un modelo de compromiso fiel que sea al mismo tiempo crítico con quien domina, comprometido con los y las vulnerables y ‘com-pasivo’ (compañerismo y pasión) en su enfoque”, dijo Rajkumar.

La consulta fue organizada de manera conjunta por la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas y el Consejo Mundial de Iglesias y fue posible gracias a la financiación del Otto per Mille (Italia). ●

Freedom of Religion: Hearing All the Cries

Acknowledging Our Context

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is committed to the flourishing of all of God's creation. Throughout our history we have discerned together the signs of the times and have confessed our rejection of fascism and other forms of tyranny, systematic evils and the denial of the fullness of life for all. Therefore, today as we witness a growing escalation in religiously fuelled hate crimes, and consequently the denial of human dignity, and the freedom of religion, belief and expression, we cannot stay silent, but are instead called to continually reform and be reformed. In line with our 2017 General Council's strong call to hear the cries of suffering people, we call on our churches to take a side, the side of the oppressed. It is for this reason that between the 25th and the 27th of February 2020, a group of 22 church leaders and theologians met in Frankfurt, Germany, to deliberate together and find a faithful paradigm of thinking over the issue of the "Freedom of Religion or Belief."

The choice of venue became particularly significant since a few days before the meeting a person who professed a far-right agenda shot and killed nine persons from "immigrant communities" in the nearby town of Hanau. And neither was the time insignificant since during our meeting New Delhi, India, was wrecked by religiously justified violence that was mainly directed towards its minority Muslim population. We recognized the violence faced by Christian communities in various parts of the world including but not restricted to Indonesia, Cameroon and South Sudan. The group was made acutely aware of the urgency of our task by these incidents, but we

were also chronically aware that these were a mere continuation of what seems to be a global trend that is denying the freedom of expression and articulation of religions. The rise of ethno-nationalisms, xenophobia, interreligious intolerance, patriarchal hegemony and racism globally has used various religious traditions to prop up their agenda. This is not only of deep concern but urgently calls on us to confess our faith together, globally and ecumenically. We further recognized that the present global climate necessitates interreligious cooperation and the building of alliances that are committed to a world that is predicated on justice and freedom.

Affirming Our Convictions

We affirm that our Scriptures assert the centrality of justice to our faith (Deuteronomy 16:20) and that God requires justice from humanity (Micah 6:4), and therefore the question of the freedom of religion must be located in the question of justice. We therefore approached this from the perspective of justice.

The group was guided by the conviction that a framework of engagement must be grounded in the experiences of the vulnerable and marginalized, those whose religious rights and identities have been violated and persecuted. Noting that in the context of religious violence, religion often serves as an identity marker that serves as a rallying point for underlying economic and material interests. We were further aware that religion is only one of the many identities because as humans we bear multiple identities which intersect with each other, and as such can make us more vulnerable to systems of oppression—namely ethnicity, gender, caste, class and sexuality. Indeed, it is also often the case that several of us carry even more than a

singular religious identity, either by practice or by family relationships. Often what is named as religious violence in actuality involves, though does not invoke, these other identities as well. We therefore recognize that in the context of polarization and religious nationalism, those most vulnerable to violence are those who are "othered" and reduced to singular identities.

Analyzing Our Perspectives

We recognized and valued the importance of the present legal framing of the freedom of religion or belief and the protections it offers to the vulnerable and the responsibilities required from states. We upheld the Universal Declaration Human Rights, article 18, which says: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his or her religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his or her religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

However, we also understood that in the present discourse the right to freedom of religion or belief as a human right emerges from a particular Eurocentric, geopolitical perspective that attempts to create itself into the only paradigm from which the freedom of religion can and must be seen. We were particularly cognizant that the present legal framework and even laws which protect religious freedom do not emerge in a vacuum but instead from a political economic context that materializes from and is in support of neoliberal imperial capitalism, in other words "empire." In such a situation, religion and religious practice are relegated to the private sphere and become a commodity to be con-

sumed along with other commodities. As long as any religion or religious tradition plays along with the rules of this game it is tolerated. But we acknowledge that our faith compels us to speak in the public square and have a prophetic voice.

It was highlighted that there are places in which the right to freedom of religion was being upheld as the primary right and was being weaponized against the vulnerable. This is particularly true in places where the freedom of religion or belief has been hijacked by the dominant in order to perpetuate discrimination against minorities and the marginalized. As it was noted that there is an increasing tendency among the majority to project itself as a “victim” and abuse narratives of suffering to legitimize the violence on the “other.”

We debated the role of the state in the protection of the right to the freedom of religion or belief. While states should guarantee the right to the freedom of religion, we recognize that states are not neutral and that even constructs of the secular state are riddled with problems. Existing democratic institutions do not always work to serve those who are oppressed, and the church should challenge these institutions to serve the cause of justice of all the oppressed. Our common human situation is not going to be helped by universalizing one particular understanding of secular democracy.

We recognize that the right to the freedom of religion or belief is indivisible from all other human rights. For example, the right to the freedom of religion cannot be used to discriminate against sexual minorities as being practiced in certain countries. However, we also recognize that the present discourse on human rights is particularly anthropocentric, ignoring the rights of the earth. We seek to learn from Indig-

enous traditions that see the earth itself as having rights and that our rights as human rights is intrinsically connected to the rights of the earth.

Admitting the Complexity of Our Scripture and Tradition

Given this situation it is necessary that we imagine a framework for religious freedom that is located in and emerges from the cries of the most vulnerable in our communities and societies. It should offer a space for their cries to not only be heard but their perspectives to lead the thinking on the freedom of religion. Such attentiveness to the divine self-disclosure in the struggles of those beyond the bounded and bordered imaginations of the powerful should be the axis around which responses to this issue should be framed. This should be a deep listening to the stories of those who have been abused by religion that should disturb us and bend us out of shape, so that we as a church would be healed by those very people, we set out to heal. We recognize that in many contexts it is Christian communities that are themselves vulnerable and are subject to violence. We recognize further that even within one particular religious tradition there are minorities who are oppressed and are oppressed precisely because of their theological traditions and embodied vulnerabilities. We further recognize that women across all religious traditions suffer the consequences of these toxic theologies and scriptural interpretations that consign women to subservience and silence. Yet we also heard and acknowledged testimonies of resistance and communities that offered hope.

We discerned the problems and promises of our Scriptures on the subject of the freedom of religion or belief. While we were, on the one

hand, enabled to see the impulse towards religious freedom in Scripture, on the other hand, we could also equally recognize that the Bible has texts that call for the annihilation of the other (Ezekiel 23) and towards genocide (Joshua 6)—calls that are problematically and violently appropriated even today. We recognize that the Bible is a site of contention and is often used against the religious “other.” Yet we also note that in Christ we are called to freedom (Galatians 5:1) and that includes the freedom of religion.

It is through the lens of the “othered” as we live out Jesus’ command to love your neighbour that we witness the moments of liberation in our Scriptures, where the bodies of the vulnerable find hope in the vulnerable and silenced bodies of Scripture. So we look to the persecuted woman who walks into the houses of the religious elites to sit at the feet of Jesus (Luke 7: 36-50); her presence and the affirmation of Jesus shamed systems of prejudice that marginalized her and regain her religious freedoms at the side of Christ. We look to the many stories of Jesus touching those who were considered impure, transgressing boundaries of purity and pollution and bringing healing (Mark 1:40-45; 10:46-52, John 9), displaying to us what true freedom of religious expression looks like. We therefore recognize the vulnerable bodies of the faithful who resist societal and political dogmas of oppression, whose lives we must bear witness to as we discern our purpose and confess our sins.

Similarly, we recognize the complexity of our own Reformed heritage on the question of freedom of religion. During the Reformation communities of refugees sought to discern what it meant to have reli-

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Najla Kassab: Les églises protestantes sont indispensables au Moyen-Orient

« **M**algré la terrible guerre civile, l'Église chrétienne de Syrie est forte et s'engage à prendre soin des personnes qui ont été touchées par le conflit, » a déclaré Najla Kassab, présidente de la Communion mondiale des Églises réformées, lors de la conférence Stob qui a conclu la série de conférences de janvier à l'Université Calvin.

Mme Kassab a souligné que l'Université Calvin, à Grand Rapids, dans le Michigan, aux États-Unis, était le lieu où la Communion mondiale d'Églises réformées fut fondée en 2010. Depuis, elle a participé à ses travaux et fut élue présidente en 2017.

« C'est ici que notre voyage a commencé », a-t-elle déclaré. « 100 millions de membres de plus de 200 Églises du monde entier sont réunis au sein de la Communion mondiale des Églises réformées pour parler de justice ».

En tant que président de la CMER, Kassab se déplace dans le monde entier pour des rassemblements et des conférences. Mais à l'université Calvin, elle a concentré ses remarques sur l'Église réformée au Moyen-Orient, et plus particulièrement sur le Liban et la Syrie.

« Ces dernières années, il y a eu tant de souffrances et de pertes, surtout en Syrie. Le défi de l'Église est d'être présente au milieu de cette douleur ».

« Les églises là-bas sortent de leurs murs et aident les personnes dans le besoin », a déclaré Kassab, l'une des premières femmes à être ordonnée dans le Synode évangélique national de la Syrie et du Liban.

« Le nombre de chrétiens diminue de plus en plus en Syrie, » a-t-elle dit, « passant d'environ un million avant la guerre à environ 400 000 aujourd'hui. Mais je crois que l'Église est plus forte qu'avant la guerre. Je pense que l'engagement de l'église dans cette région grandit. »

Najla Kassab a esquissé l'histoire des églises réformées au Moyen-Orient, en détaillant les améliorations que ce petit groupe d'églises a apportées dans l'éducation, les services sociaux et le renforcement du rôle des femmes. Des missionnaires presbytériens ont créé l'Université américaine de Beyrouth - l'une des premières universités du Liban - au milieu du XIX^{ème} siècle. Plus tard, un hôpital et un orphelinat ont été reliés à cette université.

« Cette université a contribué à façonner notre patrimoine et montre l'impact qu'une église minoritaire comme la nôtre peut avoir sur une nation », a-t-elle déclaré.

Toujours au milieu des années 1880, des missionnaires ont créé une École protestante américaine pour filles, qui a contribué à briser les préjugés et les restrictions sur la vie des femmes.

« L'éducation a contribué à l'autonomisation et à l'amélioration du statut des femmes. Elle a conduit à la

libération des femmes du Moyen-Orient et leur a permis d'utiliser leurs talents et de bien contribuer à la société », a déclaré Mme Kassab. « Cela nous a aidés à faire l'expérience de la justice et de l'amour de Dieu. Ma présence ici en est le résultat ».

Mme Kassab a obtenu sa licence en éducation chrétienne à la Near East School of Theology en 1987 et sa maîtrise en divinité au Princeton Theological Seminary en 1990. En 1993, elle a été la première femme à recevoir la permission de prêcher au sein de son église, et en mars 2017, elle est devenue la deuxième femme à être ordonnée ministre au sein du Synode évangélique national de Syrie et du Liban.

« Mon église a aidé à montrer la voie et a servi d'exemple et d'inspiration à d'autres églises protestantes », a-t-elle déclaré. Mme Kassab a également attribué aux églises protestantes le mérite d'avoir lancé de vastes programmes de publication qui ont joué un rôle clé dans l'éducation et dans la traduction de la Bible et d'autres documents dans de nombreuses langues du Moyen-Orient.

« En outre, les églises protestantes ont joué un rôle important dans le mouvement œcuménique. Nous avons été appelés à nous ouvrir à d'autres églises et à travailler plus étroitement ensemble. C'est une façon pour nous de vivre véritablement l'amour du Christ ».

La présence de l'Église s'est surtout manifestée par l'enseignement primaire, surtout en cette période de conflit le long de la frontière libanaise, où quelque 1,5 million de réfugiés de la guerre en Syrie vivent dans de petits camps de fortune.

« Souvent, les gens ne sont pas à l'aise dans une église, mais ils viendront dans nos écoles », a déclaré Mme Kassab lors d'une séance de questions et réponses après sa conférence. « Les écoles sont des endroits où nous pouvons accueillir des élèves chrétiens et musulmans ensemble et construire des ponts ».

Les parents souhaitent que leurs enfants fréquentent ces écoles, qui offrent aux enfants un répit face aux rigueurs de la vie dans un camp de réfugiés. À l'école, ils sont nourris, aidés à se laver et sont parfois autorisés à rester pendant un certain temps pour éviter les conflits dans les camps.

« Il y a tellement de besoins. Nous aidons les gens à continuer à survivre », a déclaré Najla Kassab, qui s'est consacré depuis des années au travail avec les femmes et les enfants. « Vous ne pouvez pas fermer vos portes aux réfugiés et dire que vous êtes une église. »

Ses commentaires sur le rôle de l'église contribuent à raconter l'histoire générale du Liban, qui au début était réticent à accepter tant de réfugiés. Mais cela a changé,

bien qu'il y ait toujours de nombreuses tensions, depuis que les horreurs de la guerre civile syrienne sont apparues clairement.

« Nous ouvrons des écoles pour prendre soin des enfants. Ils sont l'espoir pour l'avenir. Mais à la fin de la journée, votre cœur est brisé de les voir retourner au camp », a déclaré Mme Kassab.

En ce qui concerne l'avenir, elle a affirmé que l'église devra jouer un rôle important pour aider à la guérison et à la réconciliation lorsque la guerre se terminera un jour et que de nombreux réfugiés retourneront chez eux en Syrie. Il sera particulièrement important de construire des ponts entre les personnes de foi.

« Nous devons encourager un dialogue de la vie », a déclaré Mme Kassab. « Cela nous enrichit de grandir avec les autres religions. Les musulmans sont aussi des enfants de Dieu. »

Elle a décrit comment, au milieu des ruines de la guerre, de jeunes chrétiens et musulmans ont un jour disputé un match de football passionné sous les yeux et les encouragements de nombreux spectateurs.

Dans la région où le judaïsme, le christianisme et l'islam ont vu le jour, l'Église doit s'appuyer sur son message d'amour fondamental. Même si les guerres font rage, l'espoir peut durer si nous tenons d'abord à Dieu, a-t-elle dit.

« Nous devons sauvegarder les aspects les plus modérés de la religion », a déclaré Mme Kassab. « Plus la violence est encouragée, plus nous sommes coincés avec des attitudes de peur et de radicalisme ».

La série de conférences Stob est nommée en mémoire du Dr Henry J. Stob, professeur à l'Université Calvin et au Séminaire théologique Calvin, décédé en 1996. Le sujet de la série de conférences est lié aux domaines de l'éthique, de l'apologétique et de la théologie philosophique.

Depuis 2017, la conférence Stob a été intégrée à la série de conférences de janvier et termine la série de présentations sur une série de sujets d'actualité. Cette année, ces sujets comprenaient l'histoire de l'adoption d'une petite fille d'Haïti par un journaliste de sport, un regard sur la façon dont les médias sociaux affectent les jeunes et un appel à répondre au besoin d'eau potable dans le monde.

Najla Kassab a également participé au Symposium Calvin sur le culte, elle a rencontré les dirigeants de l'Église réformée chrétienne en Amérique du Nord (CRC) et de l'Église réformée en Amérique (RCA), toutes deux membres de la CMER, et elle a participé le dimanche à un culte conjoint de ces deux dénominations réformées. ●

—Chris Meehan,

*Responsable des Communications
de la CRC, a écrit l'article original.*

Freedom of Religion:

continued from page 9

gious freedom. However, this was often an exclusive understanding of religious freedom which meant religious freedom for the self and not for others. Yet we seek to draw inspiration from this same Reformed heritage. We looked to John Calvin who professed that all humans have inherent God-given dignity, meaning our rights are rooted in God. In the language of Calvin, God has rights and these rights also offer human rights, including the right to freedom and the right to justice. This is the God of the Cross, through whom we also derive our hope; therefore, denial of such rights is denial of God in whose image we are made. We reaffirm the cross as the symbol of resistance against religion and state where characterized by hegemony and violence of dominant and dominating power. We therefore cannot speak about the freedom of religion without speaking of justice and dignity of all humans.

We recognize both the complexities of our own faith, Scripture and traditions and yet we also recognize our own failing to live up to our best ideals. We recognize that the church has failed in its duty towards others. We have been inward-looking and serving our own interests. We call for a self-critical assessment of our history and change in our practice.

Articulating Our Vision

We recognize the suffering that communities within our own communion face, we similarly recognize our own complicity. As ambassadors of Christ, called to work for justice and to be peacemakers, we strongly condemn all forms of religious discrimination, oppression and persecution.

In this context, we privilege the perspectives of the marginalized, the communities of imagination, those whose stories are shared through acts and arts of resistance. We heard such stories and upheld such exemplary examples of cooperation and solidarity in interreligious communities for the sake of justice and freedom of all. These communities display a resistance to the dogmas of the empire, despite and precisely through vulnerability. We heard the stories of communities broken by religious violence but who worked towards restoration and reconciliation. In these stories we found hope!

We are called to assume a theology of courageous risk and a radical and mutual hospitality. For this we can look to examples of religious cooperation and support even in the midst of religious violence. We recognize that only an interreligious community of imagination can challenge nationalist notions of intolerant religiosity that deny the dignity and religious freedoms of the vulnerable. We call for a lived theology of resistance, restoration and reconciliation. ●

Gender, Führung und Macht Schwerpunkte der Beratung

Gender, Führung und Macht standen im Mittelpunkt der ersten einer Reihe von regionalen Konsultationen, die Anfang Dezember im Nordosten Indiens stattfanden.

Diese Konsultation „ist eine Einladung an die Kirchen, unser Verständnis und unsere Praxis von Führung und Macht im Kontext der Gerechtigkeit für alle Gender innerhalb der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft wie auch in der Familie und in der Gesellschaft im weiteren Sinne neu zu überdenken“, sagte Lalrindiki Ralte in ihrer Grundsatzansprache. „Es ist eine Einladung, die Bereitschaft zu haben, sich durch eine miteinander geteilte Macht und eine Leitung, die Raum für andere gibt, zu verändern, damit wir gemeinsam zur Reife des Glaubens und der Praxis heranwachsen können“.

„Da wir alle in einer patriarchalischen Gesellschaft geboren und aufgewachsen sind, nehmen wir patriarchalische Werte und Praktiken an, die Frauen untergeordnete und minderwertige Positionen zuweisen“, sagte Ralte, der derzeit als Dekan des Senats des Serampore Centre for Theological Education by Extension fungiert, nachdem er zuvor viele Jahre als Lehrkraft am Aizawl Theological College tätig war.

„Aber Tatsache ist, dass, obwohl die Männer in der patriarchalischen Gesellschaft Macht und Autorität genießen, solange die Hälfte der Menschheit oder sogar mehr weiterhin untergeordnet und ausgeschlossen bleibt, ist es auch den Männern nicht möglich, ein friedliches und würdiges Leben zu führen. Unterdrücker und Ausbeuter des eigenen Fleisches und Blutes zu sein, zerstört die Menschlichkeit der Menschen, und das Bild Gottes kann sich nicht in ihnen widerspiegeln.“



„Das Wort Gottes, die Bibel, gibt uns ein alternatives Verständnis von Führung und Macht“, sagte sie.

„Wenn Männer und Frauen gemeinsam Macht teilen, spiegeln sie das Bild Gottes wider, das in ihnen vorhanden ist. Und die Macht zu herrschen soll nicht dazu benutzt werden, sich gegenseitig und die übrige Schöpfung auszubeuten und zu unterdrücken, sondern vielmehr dazu, die Würde und das Leben aller, einschließlich der Ökologie, zu bewahren und zu erhalten.“

„Dies ist besonders entscheidend für die Kirche wegen unseres Anspruchs, der Leib Christi zu sein, in dem alle Gläubigen von gleichem Wert und gleicher Bedeutung sind, unabhängig von Genderzugehörigkeit und allen anderen Trennungsmerkmalen, die die Diskriminierung fortbestehen lassen“, sagte sie.

Die Sitzungen zum Verständnis von Gender, geschlechtsspezifischer Gewalt und zur Analyse von Gender, Führung und Macht aus biblischer, theologischer und ekklesiologischer Sicht wurden von Silpa Rani, Priscilla Rawade und Amrita Dasgupta geleitet. Esther Ao und Salome Wesley leiteten die Bibelarbeiten. Die Vortragenden setzten sich aus dem

Lehrkörper der theologischen Fakultät, Kirchenleitern und Aktivisten zusammen.

Die Konsultationsreihe soll das Bewusstsein der Mitgliedskirchen der WGRK für Fragen der Gleichstellung der Geschlechter und der geschlechtsspezifischen Gewalt schärfen, Möglichkeiten für einen Systemwandel für Frauen in Führungspositionen schaffen und Studien und Reflexionen zur Umsetzung der WGRK-Gender-Politik anbieten.

Die WGRK-Gender-Politik versucht, die Vision der WGRK zu fördern, den Ruf zur Gemeinschaft und das Engagement für Gerechtigkeit zu verwirklichen, indem sie die Kirchen befähigt und einlädt, sich an Gottes verwandelnder Mission der Geschlechtergerechtigkeit und Partnerschaft zu beteiligen.

Die dreitägige Konsultation, die vom WCRC-Büro für Gerechtigkeit und Zeugnis organisiert wurde, wurde von der Vereinigung Evangelischer Kirchen, einem der jüngsten Mitglieder der Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen, ausgerichtet und durch die Finanzierung von Otto per Mille ermöglicht. ●

Peserta program magang WCRC menerapkan pengetahuan akademik di dunia nyata

Meta Ginting menunggu saatnya mengaplikasikan apa yang telah dipelajarinya secara akademis di dunia nyata selama satu tahun sebagai peserta program magang di World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

“Sebagai seorang peneliti di bidang studi agama dan antarbudaya, pengalaman dan pengetahuan saya dapat memenuhi kebutuhan WCRC,” kata Ginting.

“Saya percaya bahwa menjadi peserta program magang WCRC akan memberikan pengalaman langsung bagi saya terlibat dalam gerakan ekumenis. Ini yang membuat hati saya tergerak, gerakan ekumenis begitu dinamis dan merupakan suatu studi yang tidak pernah berakhir. Selalu akan ada hal baru yang muncul dari gerakan ini.”

Sebagai putri petani, Ginting bertumbuh besar di wilayah utara Sumatra, Indonesia, sebagai anggota jemaat Gereja Batak Karo Protestan (GBKP) sebelum bermigrasi ke Yogyakarta untuk bersekolah, termasuk mengambil studi teologi di Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana.

“Kebanyakan orang yang mengambil sekolah teologi biasanya menjadi pendeta setelah lulus,” kata Ginting. “Tadinya saya tidak sadar bahwa belajar teologi dapat mengarah kepada berbagai pekerjaan selain menjadi pendeta atau pemimpin gereja. Dalam studi saya, saya menyadari bahwa lulusan teologi dapat menjadi guru, konselor, peneliti, aktivis, dan banyak profesi lainnya.”

Meta memindahkan fokusnya dari teologi kepada studi agama dan antarbudaya. “Dalam masa studi saya, saya menemukan kembali iman saya, dan saya merasa sangat bersyukur bisa bekerja bersama-sama orang-orang yang paling tidak



dihargai di tengah masyarakat,” katanya. “Dalam pertemuan yang saya alami dengan orang-orang ini selama masa di universitas, saya menyimpulkan bahwa Kekristenan tidak cukup hanya benar saja, melainkan haruslah juga baik – khususnya bagi dunia yang begitu rapuh.”

Meta ingin melihat keyakinan ini diwujudkan dalam aksi di WCRC. “Saya bersemangat untuk mempelajari bagaimana WCRC dan gereja-gereja anggotanya membuat rencana-rencana strategis untuk menghadapi masalah-masalah yang dialami orang-orang Kristen di seluruh dunia. Saya ingin menyaksikan bagaimana rencana kerja tersebut diwujudkan sepanjang tahun ini serta belajar mengadaptasikannya dalam konteks lokal saya nanti setelah pulang,” kata Ginting.

“Sebagai orang muda, saya ingin membawa juga pengalaman saya dan menyandingkannya dengan perspektif bagaimana gerakan ekumenis dapat lebih terlibat dengan komunitas orang-orang muda,” lanjutnya. “Saya ingin melihat lebih banyak anak muda yang terlibat dalam gerakan ekumenis.”

“Saya berharap dapat memulihkan pemahaman akan satu tubuh

Kristus dan menyentuh hati generasi yang lebih muda,” kata Ginting. “Dengan demikian, kita dapat melihat dan memastikan bahwa gereja di masa depan masih melakukan apa yang dilakukannya saat ini dan bahkan menjadi lebih baik dalam mewujudkan dunia yang sesuai kehendak Tuhan – berjalan bersama mereka yang tertindas dan terlupakan, tanpa mengambil tempat mereka melainkan menjadi suara bagi mereka dan membantu mereka menemukannya sendiri.”

Ginting akan menjadi bagian dari WCRC selama tahun 2020. WCRC akan memilih peserta magang berikutnya sebelum bulan Juni untuk mulai bekerja di pertengahan akhir tahun ini.

Program magang WCRC dapat terlaksana melalui kontribusi dari Evangelisches Missionswerk, Reformierte Kirchen Bern-Jura-Solothurn dan gereja-gereja anggotanya. ●

CANAAC charts course for future

After a year-long effort from members, the Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC) has finalized their strategic plan document, “Moving Forward towards 2022: Living Faithfully, Building Relationships as a Communion” which will guide the region’s work together.

“We felt it was necessary for us to produce this document as the standard bearer which reflects the main challenges impacting the church across our North / South spaces,” said Angela Martins, convener of the CANAAC Steering Committee. “It is our hope that this document establishes a legacy platform upon which the much-needed ecumenical work of CANAAC can be carried out in a sustainable manner into the future.”

The plan was based on the work done at the 2018 CANAAC General Assembly in Guyana and written by a committee of Assembly delegates. It is closely aligned to the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) “Strategic Plan: 2018-2024.”

The WCRC strategic plan focuses the Communion’s work through five interlocking dimensions: communion, justice, theology, mission, and ecumenical engagement and interreligious cooperation. The CANAAC plan takes each of these areas and focuses them on specific issues pertinent to the region.

“Our core intention is to strengthen the *koinonia* amongst our members, addressing critical issues in our region such as food safety and security, Indigenous and racial jus-

tice, and theological education,” said Martins. “We will seek to acknowledge emerging issues offering perspectives as support for our wider community of faith to enter into reflection as there is need to.”

CANAAC’s work will be focused through three working groups—communications, justice, and theology—along with the Steering Committee. The plan provides recommendations to accomplish the stated goals before the region’s next General Assembly, anticipated for 2022.

“We believe too that there is need for us to identify existing materials or produce resources and helpful tools as we seek to support our member churches at the grass roots level,” said Martins. ●

Lula apela al compromiso de las iglesias para abordar la inequidad global

Como una respuesta a los reclamos imperativos de justicia de la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas, el ex presidente brasileño Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva indicó que prolifera la inequidad global y que, en ese sentido, es imprescindible la participación de las iglesias para promover la justicia global y abordar la desigualdad, particularmente para sacudir a la sociedad.

Hizo hincapié en la necesidad de abordar las preocupaciones de las personas trabajadoras, campesinas y sin tierra para moldear un nuevo orden global basado en la justicia, particularmente a través de políticas de inclusión social y presupuestos nacionales equitativos.

El secretario general de la CMIR, Chris Ferguson, y Philip Vinod Pea-



Foto por cortesía de Ivars Kupcis/CMIR.

cock, secretario ejecutivo de justicia y testimonio de la CMIR, se reunieron el 6 de marzo con el ex presidente brasileño en el Centro Ecuménico, en Ginebra, Suiza.

Compartieron con el ex presidente la visión de la CMIR en relación a la justicia como un imperativo de fe, basándose para ello en la Confesión de Accra. La Confesión de Accra se sostiene en la convicción

teológica de que las injusticias económicas y ecológicas de la actual economía global desafía respuestas de la familia reformada como una cuestión de fe en el Evangelio de Jesucristo.

Se compartieron con el ex presidente ejemplos específicos de cómo la CMIR pone en práctica esta convicción, incluyendo el programa sobre la Nueva Arquitectura Financiera y

Bringing hope to dry bones:*continued from page 16*

As we journey through Lent and approach Easter in the time of coronavirus, our faith calls us to accompany Ezekiel to the hardest place: the valley of the dry bones. It is important to know that Ezekiel's vision was rooted in a real historical fact, the military and political defeat of Israel and the captivity of its leadership. Real death, real disaster. In the first steps on the journey of hope, God leads Ezekiel to honestly confront and assess the extent and truth of the disaster, to fully grasp the extent of woundedness, the truth that the bones were dry, disconnected, scattered, lifeless and many, many.

From there comes the next confusing twist in the path of hope: Ezekiel is asked the question that he had hoped would be answered for him. "Can these bones live?" He rightly

turns to God. God knows. God, rather than supplying a promise or words of hope, assigns a task. "Prophesy to these bones... O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." Turning to God for hope Ezekiel learns that God's word will heal, reconcile and restore through God's people. Ezekiel learns that he will not be a bystander to hope but must be hope's steward following God's call. Aspiring to be hope's beneficiary, Ezekiel is called to be hope's servant.

The next sign of hope is not simply the restoration of life but the rearticulating of the fragmented, the repairing of the breach and not just to all of humanity but to those most afflicted and destroyed. The historical community that was destroyed by empire is restored to make a difference. To be a light to the world. Interestingly, John Calvin in his sermons on this text always insisted that this text was not about the final resurrection but about the restoration of Israel after the exile and therefore applied to the restoration of the church in the service of God's word of hope.

Hope emerging from the valleys of the dry bones. We can see ourselves as a global *koinonia*—the World Communion of Reformed Churches in its complexity and diversity but one family standing with Ezekiel. Hope lies for us in seeing the truth of the destruction wrought by empire and also in embracing the task the God of Life gives us in the re-articulation of the earth community to serve life.

Augustine's famous quote rings loudly in this time of pandemic, in the bleak shadow of the ravages of neo-liberal capitalism, in the grip of a murderous system of global apartheid: "Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are."

There are many calls from all over the world for not simply stimulating the economy under the current capitalist model but seizing this opportunity to implement just taxation, guaranteed income, living wages and a wealth tax—to not return to the previous levels of ecological destruction and use of fossil fuel. Don't try to save air travel companies as they are, for example, insist that they change and become sustainable.

For the WCRC, hope and the responsibility of the Accra Confession calls us to seek a New International Financial Architecture, to join the struggle for justice as integral to our faith in the God of Life. There is a path of hope opening wide for us as the world emerges from this unprecedented disaster. As we mourn our losses, as we strive to return to daily life, let's remain unsettled, striving to not return to normal but to a world transformed through God's grace and our stewardship of hope.

We give thanks to God that God's Spirit is moving powerfully in our history and in these times. We give thanks that God's Spirit moves us like Ezekiel on the unexpectedly twisted path of hope that lead us to understand our role in being—with God's help—hope's servant. Rejecting the status quo and re-connecting with the broken and wounded of the world to create—with God—a new normal of peace, justice, reconciliation and healing.

We need to share and hear God's word calling us as a global family to unity and justice. The power of the Resurrection is to be the Jesus movement with all the dispossessed to ensure that we emerge from the valley of the dry bones so that all plans and promises to move on after the pandemic bring hope for the whole creation and do not return to the valley of the dry bones. ●

Económica Internacional (NAFEI) y la Campaña Impositiva Zaqueo.

También se destacó que la CMIR busca ser un movimiento hacia una comunión confesante en un contexto de apartheid global, donde el creciente racismo, el autoritarismo y los nacionalismos impulsaron a la Comunión a confesar al Dios de la vida en medio de un mundo caído entre ladrones.

El ex presidente de Brasil se encuentra visitando Europa del 3 al 11 de marzo con el fin de intercambiar con líderes políticos, sindicales y religiosos sobre la realidad de la desigualdad social. En Ginebra mantuvo reuniones con representantes de la Alianza ACT, la Federación Luterana Mundial, el Consejo Mundial de Iglesias y la CMIR. ●



Chris Ferguson

From the General Secretary

Bringing hope to dry bones

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord."

— Ezekiel 37:1-14 (NRSV)

I have come that all may have life in abundance.

—John 10:10

As a human family we were just opening our collective eyes to world-shaking crises and unparalleled threats to the life and future of the planet. We were just on the edge of naming the ravages of empire being revealed in a system of global apartheid that pits the interests of 1% of the world's people against the other 99% and even then leaves the last 50% without hope for life and livelihood. We were just grasping the extent of the massive woundedness of living a world fallen among thieves.

And then came COVID-19. The novel coronavirus pandemic unmercifully exposed our undeniable interconnectedness—all of creation, all of humanity.

The extent of the deaths and the impact on human and ecological wellbeing is yet to be seen. The efforts to slow the spread of the disease and save lives is the first priority. It is clear that with most of the world either shutdown or emerging from being shut down, that the next step for governments and people's movements lies in discerning where hope lies as we stand in the ruins wrought not only by the virus but by a global economic and political system that had left most societies faced with massive poverty, inequality, dismantled health care systems, underfunded schools, unprecedented numbers of people forced to migrate—in fact, a world exploited and ravished by the excesses and overreach of neoliberal capitalism and authoritarian governments, an unjust world for people and the suffering creation.

And so, as we take stock of the disaster brought by the pandemic, we see that getting back to normal cannot be our goal. God is surely not calling us to return to the status quo antes. God is surely calling us into a future that is marked by peace, justice, reconciliation and healing.

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