

# Reformed communiqué

Articles in Deutsch, English, Español, Français

December 2020

## WCRC begins extensive discernment process on COVID-19 pandemic

“**W**hat does God Require of Us? Discerning, Confessing, and Witnessing in an Age of COVID-19 and Beyond,” the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)’s Communion-wide discernment process, began with a global online gathering and a call to prophetic action.

“We gather today to engage in thinking together, ‘What does the Lord require of us?’ We gather to affirm our steady journey toward justice,” said Najla Kassab, WCRC president. “Today is a moment of *kairos*, where we are called to act, and strive to heal the world of the long-lasting injustices that not even the vaccine will heal. It is our road to seek new ways of strengthening the Communion and transforming the world, to dream of new alternatives and new visions of a reality based on justice.”

“This conference comes to us as Reformed Christians to the situation we find ourselves in. We are in a time between times. We want to reimagine our world and even how to reimagine how to be church in these COVID-19 times,” said Lungile Mpetsheni, moderator of the COVID-19 and Beyond Working Group.

“Global inequality is not just growing, it is shockingly entrenched and out of control,” said Allan Boesak, in remarks before presenting a draft statement. “Can the church sense, discern, and act upon the *kairos* moment that God and history has placed upon us?”

The working document, which was also shared at the session by Jennifer Leath and Rathnakara Sadananda, will be discussed and honed throughout the discernment process and says, in part:

[The Accra Confession] quite deliberately aligns itself with the Confession of Belhar. But are we ready to show the difference between a Confessing Church and a church with a confession? For Belhar that means “that the church is called to stand where God stands: namely with the poor and oppressed, and against *any and all* forms of injustice.” Standing with them means standing with them in their struggles against injustice and for dignity and life. Spiritual empowerment, encouragement, and comfort remain as a given, but offering “thoughts and prayers” are for unimaginative politicians who have run out of platitudes. We should find ways to join the revolution.

The online conference, which heard voices from five continents, was attended through Zoom by a core group and followed on multi-lingual livestreams by hundreds more. The core group will continue to meet over the next nine months in smaller “sharing” and “discernment” sessions, pairing focus groups with regional representatives.

Four larger, public theme plenaries will also be held, following

the liturgical year and focused through the WCRC’s strategic plan:

- Discerning Circle (Advent and Epiphany): 13 January
- Confessing Circle (Lent and Easter): 24 March
- Witnessing Circle (Pentecost): 9 June
- Circle on Being Reformed (ordinary time): 4 August

Each theme plenary, each of which will be livestreamed, will orient the subsequent sharing and discernment sessions, all of which build toward a face-to-face conference later in 2021 (if conditions allow).

“This process then requires of us a theologically and biblically rooted engagement that speaks to global, regional, national and local realities,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary. “We must recognize the interconnection between the local and the global. There is no local reality which is not impacted by and shaped by the global world order. There is no global reality that is not constructed through and by local communities and resources.”

The inaugural session opened with worship led by Peter Cruchley and featured contributions from Jenet Tabe (Cameroon), Vitalino Similox Salazar (Guatemala), and Kakay Pamaran (Philippines), Seforosa Carroll (Fiji), and Yvette Noble Bloomfield (Cayman Islands).

A sharing portion heard four speakers contribute on specific topics:

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# Steuergerechtigkeit kann biblische Bündnisse erneuern

**S**teuergerechtigkeit, einschließlich einer Reform der aktuellen Steuersysteme, die Umsetzung des Jubeljahres und Reparationsleistungen standen im Mittelpunkt des zweiten öffentlichen Webinars im Rahmen des Ökumenischen Seminars für Leitung, Wirtschaft und Management (Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management) am 14. September.

Den Studierenden und Gasthörerinnen und Gasthörern wurde die sogenannte „Zachäus-Kampagne“ (#ZacTax) vorgestellt, die „Veränderungen im globalen Wirtschaftssystem“ fordert, „durch die – ähnlich wie es der biblische Zöllner Zachäus tat – wenigstens ein Teil des Geldes zurückerstattet würde“, das multinationale Konzerne und die Superreichen der Welt anderen Menschen schuldeten, erklärte Justin Thacker, der Direktor von Church Action for Justice (UK). „Mehr denn je sehnen wir uns nach einer faireren Welt, einer gerechteren Welt, einer Welt, in der alle Menschen ebenbürtig

sind, einer Welt, in der die Reichen und Mächtigen aufhören, die Armen auszubeuten, ja zu bestehlen.“

„Die Geschichte von Zachäus klärt auf über die kriminellen Strukturen des globalen Steuersystems in seiner heutigen Form. Das System unterdrückt und ist sündhaft. Die Welt muss die Geschichte von Zachäus hören! Nicht nur weil es eine christliche Geschichte ist, sondern weil sie auf sehr prägnante Art und Weise aufzeigt, wie man den Mächtigen gegenüber für die Wahrheit eintreten kann“, sagte Suzanne Matala, Mitglied der Unabhängigen Kommission für die Reform der internationalen Unternehmensbesteuerung (ICRICT).

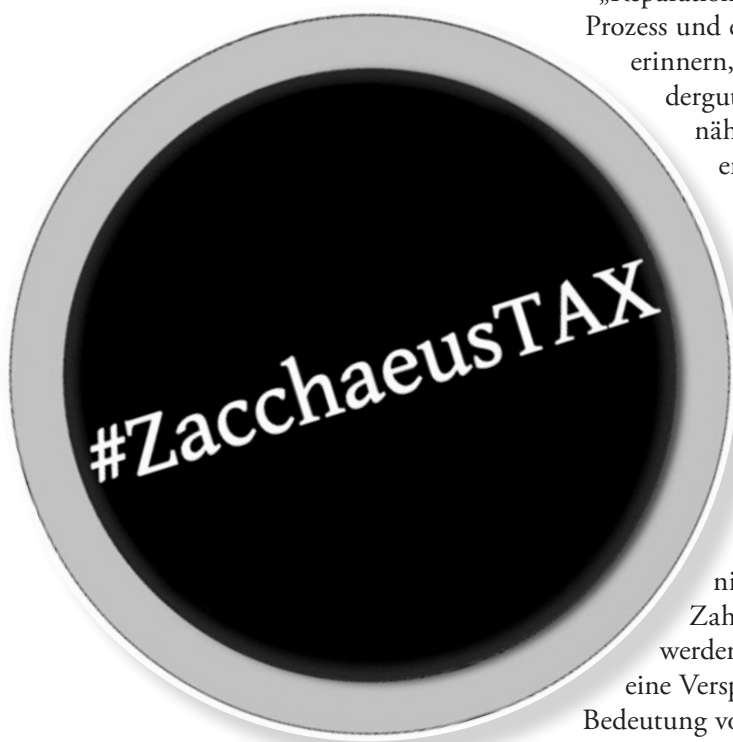
„Wir leben in einer Welt, in der große Ungleichheit zu noch größerer Ungleichheit führt. Die reichsten ein Prozent der Weltbevölkerung besitzen mehr als doppelt so viel wie 6,9 Milliarden Menschen zusammen“, erklärte Manuel „Butch“ Montez von der Gesellschaft für Internationale Entwicklung (Society for International Development, SID).

„Reparationsleistungen sind ein Prozess und eine Möglichkeit, zu erinnern, zu reparieren, wiederergutzumachen, wieder näher zusammenzurücken, Regeneration zu ermöglichen, etwas zurechtzurücken, zu entschädigen und sich zu versöhnen“, sagte Iva Carruthers, Generalsekretärin der Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference. „Reparationsleistungen dürfen nie allein auf monetäre Zahlungen reduziert werden. Das zu tun wäre eine Verspottung der wahren Bedeutung von Reparationsleis-

tungen als das Ziel eines Prozesses, der Verteilungsgerechtigkeit, Buße der Menschen und Rehabilitation anstrebt.“

James Bhagwan, Generalsekretär der Pazifischen Kirchenkonferenz, sprach über das Konzept des Jubeljahres und wies darauf hin, dass das biblische Erlass- oder Jubeljahr „sowohl eine Befreiung der Menschen, aber auch des Landes“ sein sollte. „Schon ganz zu Beginn der COVID-19-Pandemie konnten wir überall auf der Welt beobachten, dass die Lockdowns eine Verschnaufpause für das Land, die Weltmeere und die Luft bedeuteten.“

In Bezug auf die Rolle der Kirchen bei der ZacTax-Kampagne erklärte Carruthers: „Wir müssen uns verpflichten und einen Bund schließen, dass wir uns mit der Wahrheit auseinandersetzen wollen. Es braucht prophetische Führungsstärke und Mut, die Wahrheit auszusprechen und den Menschen dabei zu helfen, zu verstehen, dass ihrer eigenen Menschlichkeit am meisten gedient ist, wenn sie bereit sind, sich an dieser schwierigen Arbeit zu beteiligen.“ ●



# Panel de la Escuela Ecuménica GEM convoca a la acción profética

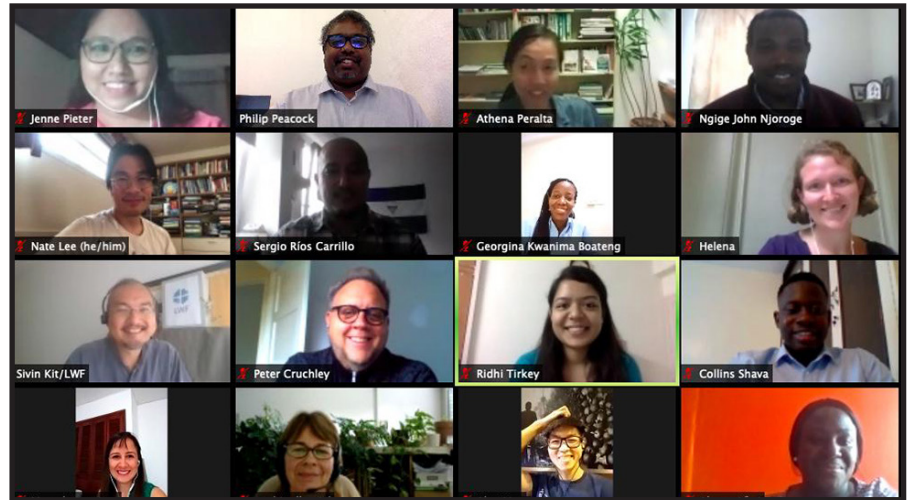
“**N**os encontramos en medio de cuatro pandemias entrelazadas. La pandemia del COVID ha revelado con mayor nitidez las pandemias de la injusticia económica, del racismo y del cambio climático”, afirmó Cynthia Moe-Lobeda en su ponencia ante la Escuela Ecuménica GEM (Gobernanza, Economía y Gestión) 2020. “Esta podría ser la puerta de entrada a maneras mucho más compasivas, justas y ecológicamente sanas de estructurar nuestra vida común en la buena tierra del jardín de Dios”.

El panel público que dio inicio a la Escuela GEM 2020, que se celebró virtualmente el 20 de agosto pasado, abordó “la economía de la vida en una época de desigualdad, pandemia y cambio climático”, a partir de ponencias de Moe-Lobeda y de Allan Boesak.

“Existe una extraña contradicción con esta pandemia del COVID, que ha expuesto de una manera bastante implacable y despiadada todas las inequidades arraigadas en nuestras sociedades desde hace mucho tiempo”, manifestó Boesak. “Pero el COVID también nos ofrece una oportunidad en la que podemos decir, ahora que sabemos esto, ahora que se nos tira en la cara: ahora es el tiempo en que debemos que hacer algo al respecto”.

La misma Escuela GEM 2020 lidia con las contradicciones de la pandemia. Por lo general, algunas docenas de estudiantes asisten a la escuela, pero al realizarse en línea este año, cientos más pueden sacar provecho para asistir a varios paneles públicos. Se planean dos paneles públicos más, sobre la campaña tributaria Zaqueo y sobre perspectivas interreligiosas.

Moe-Lobeda comenzó con una lectura de los signos de los tiempos, señalando tres puntos: 1) “no todos andamos por el mismo camino”, 2) “estas cuatro pandemias: violencia



económica, violencia racial, violencia ecológica y la violencia de la COVID — están intrincadamente relacionadas”, y 3) “las cuatro pandemias revelan con cruda y aguda fuerza, las fatales líneas de falla del actual orden económico”.

Luego presentó “cuatro conclusiones sobre cómo encarnar el amor de Cristo en medio de estas pandemias entrelazadas”:

1. Tratar de abordar una de estas pandemias sin prestar debida atención a las demás es algo peligroso.
2. Las cuatro pandemias convergen en un llamado sagrado a una reestructuración radical de la economía.
3. El movimiento hacia formas de vida más equitativas y ecológicas, que es el rostro del amor de Cristo, no es un sueño imposible.
4. La religión tiene que desempeñar un rol fundamental. Las comunidades religiosas pueden insistir en que las políticas y prácticas económicas y financieras son cuestiones morales porque determinan las relaciones humanas entre sí y también con el resto de la creación.

“Nuestro llamado a decir la verdad nos desafía a revelar y a ver más claramente las realidades socio-

económicas que han sido ocultadas por la mentira, demostrando que economías más equitativas y ecológicas son posibles y que se encuentran en proceso, aferrándose fervientemente a la verdadera promesa que, al final, el Dios de la vida ofrecerá plenitud de vida para todos y todas. Y que este Dios empodera a los seres humanos para ser manos y pies de Dios en esa sagrada tarea”, concluyó Moe-Lobeda.

Boesak basó su presentación en el concepto del apartheid global, “que incluye la explotación y las inequidades socioeconómicas, la exclusión política y social, la discriminación racial y étnica, así como la injusticia de género y la opresión heteronormativa”, y dijo: “Nuestra respuesta como iglesias y persona cristianas, por lo tanto, no debe ser solo a una crisis, sino de todo un complejo de crisis que hoy nos afectan”.

Propuso a la Confesión de Accra como un “terreno sólido al cual regresar en los ... esfuerzos por responder y ayudar a nuestras iglesias a responder a las múltiples crisis que enfrentamos. Pero, la urgencia es feroz. ... Toda injusticia impuesta a los hijos e hijas de Dios es una herida infligida a Dios mismo. Al encarar

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# Annulation de la dette et réparations au sommaire de la table ronde interconfessionnelle

Une table ronde a regroupé des expert-e-s de différentes confessions s'exprimant sur l'annulation de la dette et les réparations comme outils de promotion de la justice, de la durabilité et d'une économie qui affirme la vie dans le cadre du troisième webinar public de l'année de l'École œcuménique de gouvernance, d'économie et de gestion, organisé le 2 octobre dernier.

Le webinar a abordé les perspectives religieuses relatives à la dette, la manière dont les structures financières peuvent être alignées sur les valeurs spirituelles et le caractère fondamental de l'annulation de la dette et des réparations pour la promotion de la justice.

« Le sentiment est que les réparations sont un éthos nécessaire au sein du concert des nations. La fierté de l'argent doit évoluer vers une fierté similaire de responsabilité assumée face aux questions soulevées par l'accumulation de cet argent », déclare Jahlan Niah, coauteur de *Let Us Start with Africa: Foundations of Rastafari Scholarship* (non traduit).

Yusuf Jha, auteur du livre *The Way of Return: Responding to Economic and Environmental Injustice Through the Wisdom Teachings of Islam*, (non traduit), a proposé une rétrospective historique de « l'argent », révélant qu'avant l'apparition des pièces de monnaie, « être endetté était en fait une manière de coopérer et d'entretenir des relations. Lorsqu'une personne garde son argent pour soi, elle favorise un paradigme destructeur tant pour elle-même que pour l'environnement au sens large ».

« Les fidèles musulmans ont imaginé un lieu d'échange véritablement libre. Ils ont pris leur prophète

au sérieux et n'étaient pas motivés par l'appât du gain », poursuit-il.

David Krantz, cofondateur, président et président du conseil d'administration d'*Aytzim: Ecological Judaism*, a brossé les grandes lignes ce qu'il appelle l'« économie casher », dont relève le concept de congé sabbatique (*Schmita*) tous les sept ans — un temps de repos loin du travail et de la terre — et de jubilé tous les cinquante ans (*Yovel*) — une libération du travail, de l'esclavage et de l'endettement.



« Le système capitaliste est loin d'être parfait et a besoin d'équilibre », précise-t-il. « L'une des manières de le faire, selon la Bible hébraïque, est de redistribuer le capital. Imaginez un système qui se remet à zéro tous les cinquante ans. »

Karen Georgia Thompson, pasteur principale adjointe et coresponsable exécutive des ministères mondiaux de l'Église unie du Christ, a cité 1 Corinthien 12: « Nous enseignons que si un membre du corps souffre, tout le corps souffre et pourtant, au sein de ce corps, nous voyons les maltraitances historiques faites aux corps africains et d'ascendance africaine.

Le mouvement de réparation est un appel à une relation juste et à l'unicité de tout ce que Dieu a créé. »

Pour ce qui est de progresser vers des économies justes, la pasteur Thompson précise: « L'Église a un rôle à jouer dans la demande de réparation, et elle doit prendre la tête de ce mouvement. »

« Les réparations doivent reposer sur un investissement dans l'être humain et la rectification des torts liés au travail des Africain-e-s comme esclaves, les privant de leur

vie et de leur liberté au profit des gains pécuniaires des Européen-ne-s », dit-elle.

« Nous avons le choix: le commerce peut être perçu comme une forme de coopération ou comme une forme d'inimitié et de séparation », reprend M. Jha. « Nous devons porter notre concours aux institutions qui soutiennent la collaboration, l'unité et la coopération. »

« Les organismes internationaux de financement devront opérer une décolonisation et cesser de perpétuer des activités néocoloniales.

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# Dialogue report sees *koinonia* as God's gift and calling

The Reformed-Anglican Dialogue's report of its work, *Koinonia: God's Gift and Calling*, is now available for purchase and downloading.

The report looks at the theological foundations of *koinonia* (communion), how the church's ecclesiology might be understood in the light of it, and at the implications for living with conflict and engaging in mission. It states, "We encourage our two communions publicly and consciously to recommit to deepening that unity we already share in the *koinonia* given in creation and uniquely renewed in Christ."

"The report provides valuable information and resources on the theological background of the notion of *koinonia*, it calls the church to recommit to the challenges involved in this notion, and it points the church to possible ways of doing this today both in the life of the church and in its mission," said Dirk Smit, professor of Reformed theology and public life at Princeton Theological Seminary.

"In this time of the coronavirus pandemic, grasping how our call to *koinonia* connects us to all creation is a saving message," said Wes Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary emeritus of the Reformed Church in America. "This report, in our time, has a message so providentially relevant that its home should be in offices of local Reformed pastors and elders and Anglican priests, who daily work to hold together our practice of communion and our commitment to God's mission and justice in the world."

"The text shows a strong sense that the church itself is wounded in so many ways and is therefore deeply challenged by its own claims about *koinonia* in a wounded world," added Smit. "At the same time, it confesses its con-

viction that *koinonia* as gift of God has the power to transform conflict so that conflict loses its power to divide."

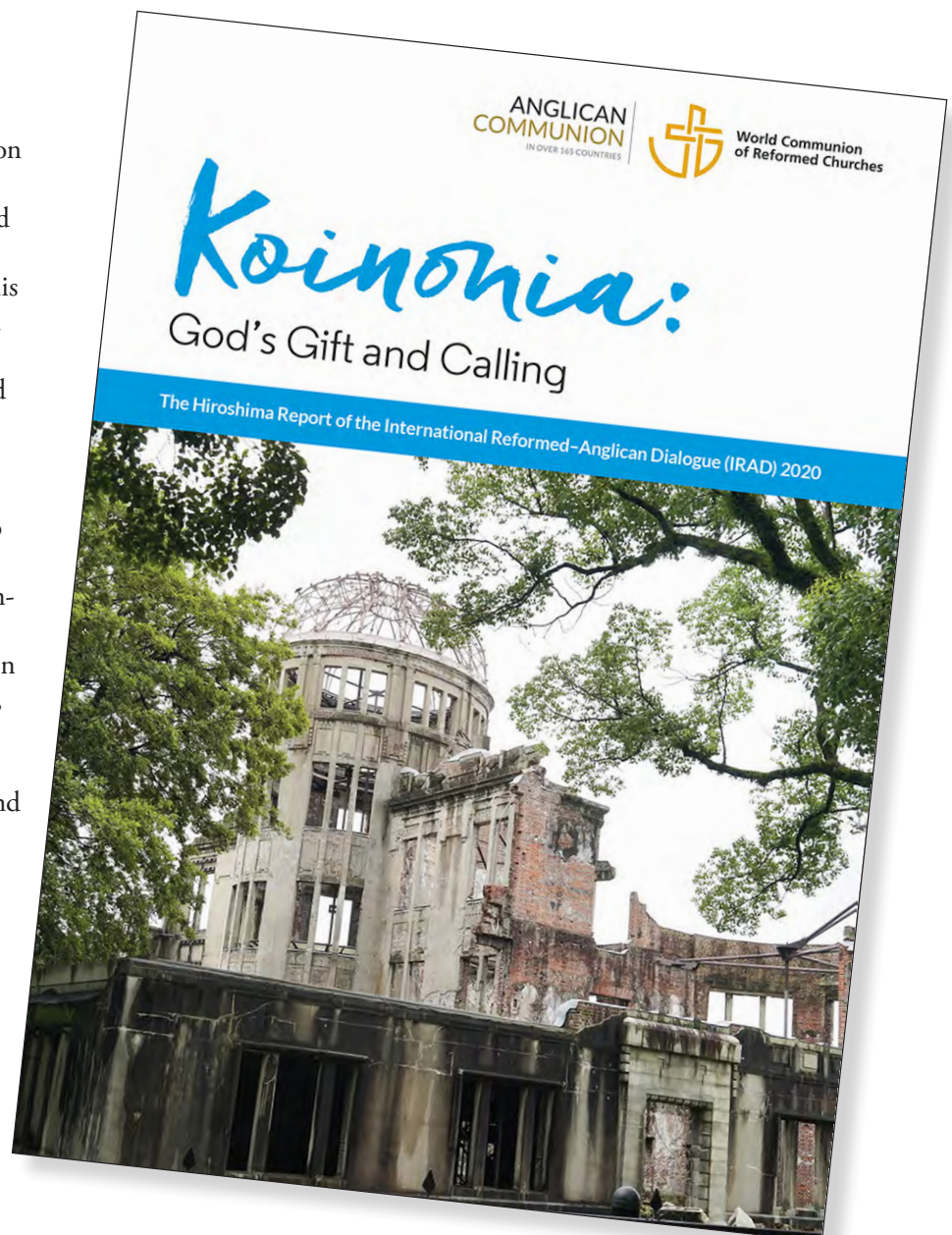
"I believe that the thinking about *koinonia*, or communion, and how our two communions receive this from the Triune God, and live it out together in God's world, will be a significant offering to our churches," said Elizabeth Welch, Reformed co-chair of the dialogue.

"It is my hope that the report of this dialogue will be received and engaged in to advance the experience

and witness to *koinonia* within and across our two traditions," said Howard Gregory, Anglican co-chair.

The dialogue brought together theologians from the Anglican Communion and the World Communion of Reformed Churches from around the world. This is the first Reformed-Anglican report since *God's Reign and our Unity* in 1984.

*Koinonia: God's Gift and Calling* can be bought on Amazon in the USA, Canada, Europe, and Japan. It may be also downloaded for free from the WCRC website. ●



# Nyomi reflects on 40 years of ministry in new book

**A**fter many years of being pestered by people to write memoirs of his life and ministry, Setri Nyomi, former general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), could not resist the idea anymore, despite feeling that it would be self-serving to draw attention to himself.

*By God's Grace: Memoirs of Setri Nyomi* was released on the 40th anniversary of Nyomi's ordination as a minister.

"I was ordained a minister by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, in 1980. I have been privileged to serve the church in my local communities as well as continent wide through the All Africa Conference of Churches and worldwide through the World Communion of Reformed Churches. I have also been a theological educator and have taught in Trinity Theological Seminary, Ghana (where I still am teaching), Princeton Theological Seminary

in the USA, and Goettingen University in Germany," Nyomi said.

In the memoirs Nyomi tells the story of God's role in his life with the hope that it will draw attention to the God of grace, and not to him as an individual. "Even the details of my life story that are shared in this volume are meant to convey the depth of God's grace available not only to the individual called Setri Nyomi, but to all who are beneficiaries of God's salvation, and who trust in God," he said.

The book is also meant to help researchers to catch details of some significant events that took place under Nyomi's watch in the leadership positions he held, especially in the WCRC. The book further gives church academics and other researchers access to his take on some specific themes that were important for him in ministry.

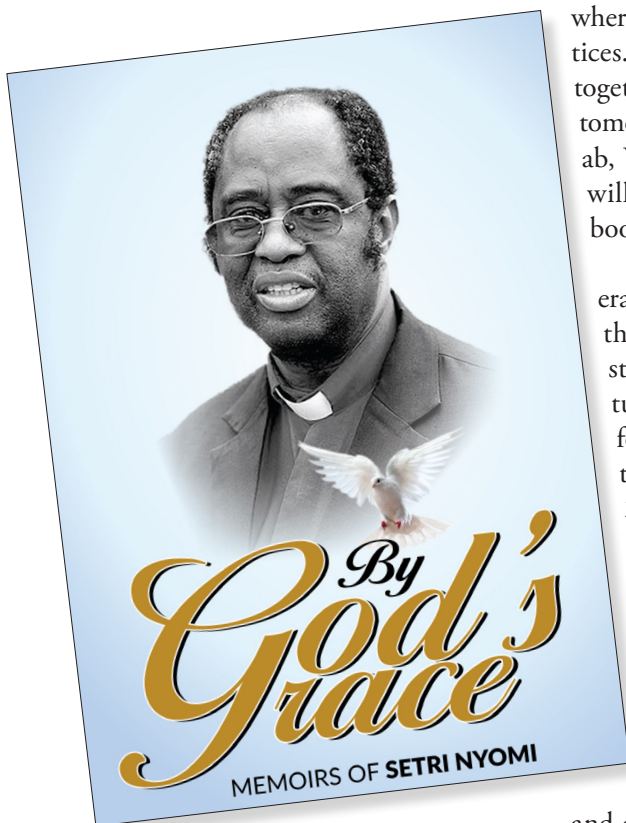
"We thank God for your witness and continuous voice for justice—for taking the time to spell clearly where there is pain and unjust practices. We continue our journey together, dreaming of a better tomorrow for all.," said Najla Kassab, WCRC president, in a "goodwill message" contained in the book.

Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, noted his particular thanks for Nyomi's efforts "in steadfastly shepherding and nurturing the process of covenanting for justice and the Earth that led to the Accra Confession in 2004. This was a difficult and conflictual process that forged the distinctive witness of WARC (World Alliance of Reformed Churches, a WCRC predecessor) in such a profound way that it continues to mark the WCRC as a global koinonia called to communion and committed to justice."

Nyomi reviewed that the time he served as general secretary of WARC and WCRC from 2000 – 2014 is among his ministry highlights, and he shared some of the events that took place during his tenure which include:

- The Accra Confession. "We still have a long way to go on the full impact of the Accra Confession. We are still not where we need to be in term of a New International Financial and Economic Architecture. Moving further would have been a wonderful legacy, however, we are still thankful to God for how far we came before I left office," he said.
- Works of gender justice and moving more churches to accept the ordination of women, as well as the creation of several gender justice manuals.
- The union between WARC and REC (Reformed Ecumenical Council) to create the WCRC and the testimony it gives for overcoming division.
- The work of quiet diplomacy which helped to heal some divisions, as well as accompanying some churches through difficult times; the work of diplomacy also included confronting the corridors of political power, whenever necessary.
- Taking and implementing tough decisions during some major financial challenges, including relocating the WCRC to Hannover, Germany, from Geneva, Switzerland, while keeping ecumenical relationships strong.

These memoirs become the second book written by Nyomi, after *Happily Married? Yes, it is Possible!* (2010), which was recently reprinted. ●



# WCRC partners on critical advocacy issues

**T**he World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has joined with ecumenical partners and its regions to call for justice in several critical areas: global sovereign debt relief, political reform in Peru, and the protection of freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia.

## Sovereign debt relief

In a letter to leaders of the Group of Twenty (G20) on 17 November, the WCRC joined with the World Council of Churches (WCC), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and Council for World Mission (CWM) through the NIFEA\* process to urge easing of pressure on countries being suffocated by debt especially in a time of pandemic. The organizations represent more than 500 million Christians across the world.

“Hundreds of billions of dollars continue to be directed away from life-saving public health and social service systems, towards debt payments,” reads the letter. “The most difficult period likely lies ahead as more countries are expected to fall into debt default in 2021.” Therefore, “real, more durable solutions are called for to address the debt crisis as well as COVID-19-exacerbated hunger, joblessness, and homelessness.”

G20 governments and financial institutions need to provide the means to alleviate and release countries from their onerous and historic debt burdens as well as establish a comprehensive, fair, transparent, and timely international debt restructuring mechanism to address sovereign insolvency, the letter urges.

## Political reform in Peru

The WCRC supported a statement from AIPRAL, the WCRC’s regional council in Latin America, inviting member churches “to accompany Peru in prayer and call on all people of good will to stay alert and active in response to the situation in Peru.”

The statement notes that Peru “is mired in a profound crisis and in the uncertainty of death and suffering. Already victimized by a high incidence of COVID-19 infections and death, Peru now finds itself in a political crisis that has further undermined the credibility of government institutions and weakened its democratic systems.”

“Peru’s political system will find no solutions to the current crisis if it continues to shelter corruption, impunity, and the major business deals that extract great

wealth from Peru’s national resources while leaving scant benefits for the majority of the population,” reads the statement.

## Religious protections in Indonesia

A letter sent to the president of the Republic of Indonesia, jointly signed by the general secretaries of the WCRC and LWF, states that in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic we “have been in communication with our member churches in Indonesia, who have confirmed the struggles they are facing, including the recent attacks against their houses of worship and their ability to offer online worship. It has been deeply disturbing to see the intolerance and violence targeted at churches and their various religious activities.”

The letter notes several recent attacks, as well as “systemic restrictions of churches’ existence” and calls on the president “to intervene to enable churches to exercise the human right to worship together and be in communion with one another in ways that are safe and that align with public health guidance for the prevention of the spread of the pandemic.”

It notes that both the WCRC and LWF affirm the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as enshrined in the International Human Rights Law and rooted in justice, and concludes by saying, “our member churches stand ready to support your government in addressing this very urgent matter and in your work for greater reconciliation, human rights, and dignity for all your people. We shall continue to pray for and stand in solidarity with all people who are particularly vulnerable.”

All statements and letters are available on the WCRC website. ●

*\* NIFEA, originally initiated by the WCRC, is the New International Financial and Economic Architecture initiative, a joint project with CWM, LWF, and WCC, and funded in part by Otto per Mille.*

*The WCC contributed to portions of this article.*

# Global religious leaders urge end to “broken state of European migration”

**A**dozen global and regional religious organizations released an advocacy statement on the situation of migrants and refugees in Europe that defines their calling as Christians to “welcome the stranger,” and urges the creation of a world in which “we become human together.”

“Solidarity should be the guiding principle governing migration and particularly refugee reception,” the statement says. “We expect the EU to reject the discourse and politics of fear and deterrence, and to adopt a principled stance and compassionate practice based on the fundamental values on which the EU is founded.”

The organizations have issued the statement in advance of the EU Commission’s presentation of its new Migration Pact on 23 September.

“Our organizations represent churches throughout Europe and globally as well as church-based agencies particularly concerned with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers,” the statement reads. “As Christian organizations, we are deeply committed to the inviolable dignity of the human person created in the image of God, as well as to the concepts of the common good, of global solidarity and of the promotion of a society that welcomes strangers, cares for those fleeing danger, and protects the vulnerable.”

The statement refers to the recent fire at the Moria camp, which left 13,000 migrants without a home.

“The events of the night of 8 September 2020 in the Moria camp and during the following days have once again exposed the fundamentally broken state of European migration and asylum policy and the suffering it has created,” the statement says, pointing to “the desperation of people seeking protection who have often been forced to live for years in inhumane conditions,

the anger and frustration of locals who feel that Europe has left them alone with the challenge of reception and care, the current response has addressed the symptoms of a greater problem but not the actual cause, and a reaction by the EU which expresses sympathy but shows a profound lack of responsibility and no real commitment to helping those in need of protection as well as the Greek state and the local population hosting them.”

COVID-19 has exacerbated already inhumane living conditions for migrants, the statement notes. “COVID-19 and its consequences have in many places rendered the already difficult situation in these countries and for the displaced populations they host even more precarious: be it due to inadequate hygiene in these facilities or the dramatic cuts of food rations and other assistance available to them,” the statement reads. “Widespread restrictions on internal and cross-border movement in the wake of the pandemic have further reduced people’s access to protection. In addition, the economic survival of many people on the move, as well as their hosts, has been imperiled by lockdowns and related measures, which have hit those employed in the informal sector particularly hard, and have had a disproportionate effect on women and their livelihoods.”

The religious organizations commit themselves to “advocating for a more dignified approach to the reception, protection, and care of people on the move.” It states that “churches and church-based agencies have been and will be proactive in offering a compassionate welcome, and promoting social integration and a just and peaceful living together, in Greece and the whole of Europe and beyond.”

The statement also addresses the public discourse in which “migrants and refugees are often the focus for hate speech in social media, as well as distorted and dehumanizing portrayals in the media” and calls for media to “respect the human dignity of migrants and refugees, ensure balanced coverage of their stories, engage with migrants and refugees and enable them to tell their own stories, and to avoid stereotypical, negative expressions, as well as victimization and oversimplification.”

“We also share the conviction that the core values of the European Union regarding human dignity and respect for human rights must be reflected in its day-to-day politics,” the statement says.

*The statement was co-signed by the ACT Alliance, the Anglican Communion, the Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe, the Conference of European Churches, the Evangelical Church of Greece, the Integration Center for Migrant Workers – Ecumenical Refugee Program, Non Profit Organisation of the Church of Greece, the Lutheran World Federation, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Association of Christian Communication, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (European Region), the World Council of Churches and the World Methodist Council. ●*



# WCRC joins call to protect human rights in the Philippines

**T**he World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has joined Christian organizations around the world “to stand with the Filipino people in light of the deteriorating situation of civil liberties and human rights in the Philippines.”

Following a global virtual meeting convened by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines and International Ecumenical Convocation for the Defense of Human Rights, the “Unity Statement for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in the Philippines” was issued.

The statement raises serious concerns about the deteriorating situation in the Philippines, including:

- We are alarmed by the passage into law of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, which poses serious threats on civil liberties. This law practically legitimizes unlawful arrests and detentions, thereby undermining due process of law and equal protection of the law that are guaranteed by the Philippine Constitution.
- The proliferation of extrajudicial killings, including the killing of thousands of people under a so-called “war on drugs”, is reprehensible. We are concerned that a general climate of impunity has been synergized with the Philippine president’s unabashed incitement to violence and regular calls for state forces to punish legitimate dissent by the citizenry.

“We call for an end to these killings. We stand with the Filipino citizenry in denouncing state impunity and the wanton display of violence and brutality by state forces. We affirm that due process of law and the equal protection of the law are constitutive of a just and democratic governance and guarantees

protections arising from both domestic and international laws that the Philippines have sworn to abide by,” says the statement.

“Our member church, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, is one of the churches specifically being attacked for their human rights work and social justice witness,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary. “Church leaders have been labeled communists, which in the Filipino context can be a virtual death sentence, given the spiraling extra judicial killings.”

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has been used as an excuse to heighten violations of civil rights. “This is one of the clearest examples of COVID measures being used to impose social control and military repression,” said Ferguson.

The statement also includes ways in which the signees will support Filipinos, including advocating “for the United Nations Human Rights Council to ‘establish an on-the-ground independent, impartial investigation into human rights violations in the Philippines.’”

“We will continue to uphold God’s gift of human dignity in the Philippines and everywhere, working with human rights defenders, and maximizing all venues and platforms to put a spotlight on those who violate and undermine human rights so that they are called to face justice and account for their transgressions,” concludes the statement.

Several WCRC member churches have already signed onto the statement, and the WCRC urges its members to join in solidarity, prayer, and active support for their sisters and brothers in the Philippines. ●

## Annulation de la dette

*Suite de la page 4*

Une finance juste n’est pas juste de la finance. Il s’agit d’impartialité, d’équité, de confiance et d’honnêteté — voici que nous aimerions voir progresser », ajoute M. Niaah.

L’École œcuménique de gouvernance, d’économie et de gestion (GEM) est une initiative conjointe du Conseil pour la mission mondiale, de la Fédération luthérienne mondiale, de la Communion mondiale d’Églises réformées et du Conseil œcuménique des Églises. Son objectif est d’améliorer les connaissances en économie au sein des Églises en dotant les participant-e-s des outils et stratégies de communication leur permettant de défendre efficacement les transformations urgentes requises dans la sphère économique et financière mondiale. ●

## Panel de la Escuela Ecuménica GEM

*Continúa de la página 3*

obras de justicia, no solo estamos sanando a los hijos heridos y a las hijas lastimadas de Dios, sino que estamos sanando las heridas de Dios mismo”.

“El empoderamiento espiritual, anímico y de consuelo sigue siendo una gracia para la iglesia”, expresó. Pero, al llamar a las iglesias a la acción, dijo que “ofrecer solo ‘pensamientos y oraciones’ es algo para políticos sin imaginación que se han quedado sin lugares comunes”.

“Deberíamos encontrar las maneras de unirnos a la revolución en curso. El poder y la destrucción del imperalismo y la revuelta contra él no son los monstruos Escila y Caribdis a través de los cuales la iglesia debe tratar de navegar con seguridad. Es una opción que debemos tomar. Y debemos recordar: “Muchas son las personas llamadas, pero pocas las elegidas. Pero las que son elegidas serán conocidas por sus opciones”.

Moe-Lobeda enseña ética social y teológica en la Universidad Luterana del Pacífico. Boesak es un teólogo negro, liberacionista y activista anti-apartheid.

La Escuela Ecuménica de Gobernanza, Economía y Gestión (GEM, por sus siglas en inglés) para una Economía de la Vida es una iniciativa conjunta del Consejo para la Misión Mundial, la Federación Luterana Mundial, la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas y el Consejo Mundial de Iglesias.

La Escuela GEM tiene como objetivo fomentar el conocimiento económico dentro de las iglesias al equipar quienes participan con las herramientas y el lenguaje adecuado para abogar eficazmente por transformaciones urgentes en el ámbito financiero y económico mundial. ●

# WCRC calls for prayer for peace in Nagorno-Karabakh region

**A**s the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region moved into a second month, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) joined with its member church, the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, to “call for justice and peace, and to unite in prayer to Almighty God to ‘let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream’ (Amos 5:24).”

A statement from the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East said:

The supposed principle of “territorial integrity” is being improperly invoked. It is being raised without historical integrity and without being anchored in a strong foundation of justice and peace that is sustainable in the long term. It is being used to justify the trampling underfoot of the principle of self-determination as attacks on Armenian civilians and civilian infrastructure continue unabated. Silence and political maneuvering are leading to the deaths of thousands, the rekindling of antagonisms, and the fading away of hopes for a cease-fire.

The WCRC called on member churches to pray and work for an immediate ceasefire, followed by a lasting peace of justice and reconciliation.

After six weeks of fighting, Russia brokered a ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan and has sent peacekeeping troops to the region.

## WCRC calls for prayers and fasting for West Papua

The World Communion of Reformed Churches, in solidarity with the West Papuan Council of Churches and the Pacific Council of Churches, called for prayer and fasting for West Papua.

The situation of human rights abuses and injustice in West Papua continue to escalate with the recent shootings—one fatal—of a catechist and pastor.

In light of these recent abuses and the historical struggle of the West Papuan people the WCRC invited members of the Communion into fasting for one meal each day until 6 December, which is celebrated as Pacific Freedom Day. In addition, the Pacific Council of Churches called for a whole day fast, from sunrise to sunset, on each of the Wednesdays until 6 December.

The WCRC also called for a cessation of all violence, the restoration of human rights in Papua, and the establishment of peace with justice. ●

# El Amazonas está en grave riesgo



*Aerial view of the Amazon rain forest, near Manaus, the capital of the Brazilian state of Amazonas.*

Picture by Neil Palmer (CIAT)

Una conversación ecuménica en línea titulada “La creación gime desde la Amazonia” el 22 de agosto se centró en la selva amazónica como “un lugar sagrado para 34 millones de sufren a causa de la desigualdad creciente, la invasión de las tierras, el extractivismo, la relajación de las leyes medioambientales, la criminalización y asesinato de los activistas medioambientales y los incendios orquestados por las industrias agrícolas; todo ello, agravado por el proselitismo”.

Tuvo lugar un debate virtual organizado conjuntamente por Qonakuy, una red de universidades protestantes y evangélicas de América Latina, y por la Alianza de Iglesias Presbiterianas y Reformadas de América Latina (AIPRAL); con el apoyo de UniReformada, una institución de enseñanza superior fundada por la Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia, que es miembro del Comunion Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas.

En 2019 fueron noticia los más de setenta mil incendios y la deforestación que asolaron la Amazonia. En 2020, según un informe de Greenpeace Internacional, solo en los

diez primeros días de agosto, se detectaron más de diez mil focos de incendio en la región, lo que representa un aumento del diecisiete por ciento con respecto al año anterior.

“Lo que es impactante y repugnante es la absoluta falta de respeto por la selva y por los treinta y cuatro millones de personas que la habitan, entre ellos, trescientos ochenta pueblos indígenas, de los cuales ciento cuarenta viven voluntariamente aislados”, denuncia Mara Manzoni Luz, directora regional del Centro Regional Ecuménico de Asesoría y Servicio (CREAS).

“Estos pueblos ya han soportado todas las amenazas imaginables, lo han resistido todo, y han elegido vivir en sus tierras, ríos y selvas ancestrales y protegerlos. Ahora, sus vidas vuelven a estar en riesgo a causa de la COVID-19, que se está cebando con ellos”, añade Manzoni, que es miembro laico de la Iglesia Anglicana Episcopal del Brasil.

También denuncia que hay misioneros proselitistas que utilizan la Biblia para penetrar en las comunidades indígenas en contra de la voluntad de las personas, con el fin de dismantelar el liderazgo comunitario y desacreditar los conocimientos

ancestrales, en asociación con los proyectos económicos de las grandes empresas.

Las últimas cifras registradas en relación con los efectos de la COVID-19 en la región muestran que, a 19 de agosto, los indígenas infectados por el coronavirus ascendían a 44 881 y 1442 habían fallecido; tras haberse propagado entre 221 nacionalidades.

“Lo que no se ha logrado con decenios de expolio, gracias a la resistencia de los pueblos amazónicos, se está intentando lograr utilizando la pandemia para ampliar las fronteras agrícolas, la deforestación y el extractivismo”, asevera Manzoni.

Otro participantes en la conversación, moderada por el doctor Humberto Martín Shikiya, secretario general de Qonakuy, fueron el Rev. Dario Barolin, secretario ejecutivo de la AIPRAL; João Gutemberg Sampaio, de la Red Eclesial Panamazónica; y el Rev. Milton Mejia, de UniReformada.

Vea la grabación del evento: [youtube.com/watch?v=fiWx9wPex7o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiWx9wPex7o)

*Artículo original cortesía del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias..* ●

# Communion engages in 16 Days of Activism

Every year the United Nations dedicates 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which ends with the commemoration of Human Rights Day on 10 December. The theme for this year was "Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!"

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is among the many organizations which supports equality between women and men in church and society, noting in the Accra Confession, "We reject any form of injustice which destroys right relations—gender, race, class, disability or caste."

The WCRC, along with and through the agency of its member churches took part in commemorating the 16 Days of Activism through different activities.

The WCRC, together with the Lutheran World Federation, ACT Alliance, and the South Africa-based Sonke Gender Justice network are co-hosting a series of three webinars aimed at working towards transforma-

tive masculinities and promoting gender justice in a post-pandemic world. They are:

1. masculinity and power within the church (26 November)
2. engaging feminism and self-reflection for liberation (9 December)
3. positive masculinities and allyship for transformation (20 January, 2021, 15:00 CET)

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and several of its agencies partnered to raise awareness and funds to battle gender-based violence at home and around the world. They launched a campaign called "the Tamar Campaign," based on 2 Samuel 13, in which Amnon, a son of King David, rapes his half-sister Tamar. World Renew and other CRCNA agencies held a webinar titled "Violence against Women and Girls in North America: How You Can Make a Difference," in which four people working in various ways in the field of gender-based violence spoke about the issue.

The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern African (UPCSA) in a statement called for an end to gender-

based violence and for the change of attitudes and behaviour that perpetuates gender-based violence. "The UPCSA supports all the efforts to eradicate this scourge and supports the victims of gender-based violence, wherever they are, while condemning the perpetrators wherever they are. We, therefore, implore all the congregations to roll out programmes to proactively empower and capacitate people on gender-based violence," the statement read. The UPCSA exists and operates within South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Latin America (AIPRAL) with its Department of Women in commemorating the 16 Days of Activism called on all ecclesial communities to be therapeutic

communities of faith, of love, of service, and become spaces free of violence, further encouraging women to remain hopeful as it is possible to live and promote a life without violence.

The Uniting Church in Australia said in the context of COVID-19 and escalating domestic

and family violence that the church is called to walk alongside people to break the silence against gender-based violence. The Uniting Church in Australia reaffirmed its commitment to shape communities where women and children are free from violence and live in safety.

The United Church of Christ (UCC) called on the end of gender-based violence by saying that the "Thursdays in Black" campaign adds the voices of the church to the voices that have already been raised, bringing a wide range of voices to the cry for justice for the elimination of gender-based violence. The UCC further called for churches to be part of the awareness campaign in order to move towards a world without rape and violence.

The Church of Scotland's Violence Against Women Task Group pledged their support to the Church to tackle violence against women, girls, and children and to develop resources and tools for local churches, congregations, and communities through its "16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children" campaign. ●



# Cameroon conference on peace empowers religious leaders



**A** two-day conference in Buea, Cameroon, has empowered religious leaders to offer vital input into a peace plan in the divided nation. Samuel Fonki Forba, president of the Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon, said that the conference helped religious leaders build their capacity in the area of peace.

Forba said that the conference helped religious leaders build their capacity in the area of peace. "The conference has equipped us; now we are ready to go out as peace ambassadors to broker peace in the restive regions of our country," he said.

Cameroon's 27 million people have two official languages—English and French—but the people in the two linguistic groups are divided, adding to the nation's woes and its church leaders' concerns. They also face another affliction—violent extremists such as Boko Haram.

"A new term that we gained in the workshop is to go out as 'religious diplomats,' and broker peace in the rest of the regions of our country," Forba said.

The conference was organized by the Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon and supported by the Ecumenical Forum on the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon.

"The conference was such a huge success," Forba said. "It has enabled us to take a date for a peace crusade on the second of January. It also gives us the possibility of creating a religious committee that will be doing business on behalf of the rest of religious leaders in Cameroon."

Forba noted that conference participants included religious leaders from different parts of Cameroon, with representation from Muslims, Catholics, a Pentecostal group, Protestants, and the Full Gospels Church, "so it was amply representative of all religious groupings in Cameroon."

After the workshop, the leaders present issued a statement saying "that the cost and consequences of the armed conflict in Anglophone Cameroon and the Boko Haram insurgency in the North are becoming increasingly unbearable on the local populations who are paying a high price for these conflicts."

"We the Religious Leaders of Cameroon acknowledge our neutrality and impartiality while reserving our rights to point out what is right or wrong in any conflict situation, decided to make the following declarations," the statement reads.

The statement declares the readiness of religious leaders of Cameroon to use their institutions and means to "objectively, faithfully, fearfully and lovingly assist, if not play a front role to bring about a just and peaceful end to the armed conflict ravaging Anglophone Cameroon."

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is a member of the Ecumenical Forum on the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon. Funds from *Otto per Mille* were utilized to hold the conference as a part of the WCRC's Global Peace Initiative project. ●

*Article courtesy of the World Council of Churches.*

*Photo courtesy of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon.*

## From the General Secretary

*Continued from page 16*

together. To actively seek to incarnate an answer to the question: What does God require of us in times of COVID-19 and beyond?

The plain vision incarnated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ speaks to the whole world context. Luke's Gospel in chapter 2 sets out the story of Jesus's birth in the starkest historical and political terms. A decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. The whole inhabited earth—the Empire, the conquered-dominated world—all of it was to be put on the property ownership list of an emperor considered to be the son of God.

There is a vision, says Habakkuk, for such an appointed time. A time of global oppression and global disaster. And it speaks of the end. No, not the end of the world. Not the end of all history. But in the words of Pablo Richard, a Chilean Liberation theologian, an end to the history of oppression. A desired, God-driven end to this unjust world order.

And it requires us to embrace the advent of watchful discernment, to see the stirrings of that life-giving Word, incarnate in the poor, powerless, landless, despised, dispossessed, the refugee, the abused, the women—and to make plain the vision and to embrace it.

From that watchtower built from weariness, uprising, and struggle we are called, led, and nurtured into the discernment that “what has come into being was life and life was the light of all people” and that from his fullness we have received grace upon grace.

That grace is seen in the faithful witness of our global family, in the leadership of our Executive Committee, officers, and president. In all those who cry out for change and rise up for justice. All who reach out to serve.

The free, unencumbered grace to faithfully discern the stirrings of life in the face of it all to join as a global family in Jesus Christ and defend, protect, and nurture the vision of abundant life or empowered by the good news...not that it is all behind us, but that God has pitched God's tent among us, and the vision of an end to this story of injustice is for this appointed time does speak of an end, and, no, it does not lie.

In the words of a New Creed of the United Church of Canada:

“In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone.”

Thanks be to God. ●

## WCRC begins extensive discernment process

*Continued from page 1*

1. *Confrontation with pain and death*: J. Herbert Nelson (USA): “The moral cause ought to be lifted up: people over money, people over exorbitant wealth, people over not being patient enough to get through this. Choosing people over money, choosing life over death.”
2. *Confrontation with the collapse of communion and church life*: Dimitris Boukis (Greece): “This has become a period of re-examining our theological identity and ministerial priorities. The whole pandemic issue made us engage in new ways to telling the Gospel in word and deed.”
3. *Confrontation with marginalization and exclusion*: Bisan Mitri (Palestine/Israel): “The checkpoints are still intact, restrictions of movement—while such measures will cease to exist when we overcome the pandemic elsewhere, it will continue to be a part of our daily life after.”
4. *Confrontation with hardened structures of injustice*: Gloria Ulloa (Colombia): “All of this panorama of injustice seems to be breaking our hope as humanity. We in Colombia we continue to affirm that we should look for peace and follow it. We call on our church, we call on our communion, to discern how all of these manifestations of injustice are counter to the will of God and to continue to work on reconciliation. God calls us to be a prophetic voice of hope and of peace.”

In response to the presentations, Paulo Junior (Brazil) said, “I am convinced that we are to take a side in the revolution as a confessing community of faith, asking ourselves, ‘how can we accompany the journey of the oppressed people in hope?’”

“The injustice has become difficult to fathom and has become normal. Our world has become a blind fight for mammon. How can we join in on a scandalous re-envisioning of our world?” asked Victoria Turner (United Kingdom).

“It is in this context that there is a Christ who identifies and chooses the most vulnerable in society. And, indeed, it should be this very Christ who has called us to emulate him—to stand on the side of the most vulnerable, the ones most impacted by this vaccine,” said Rothney Tshaka (South Africa) in discussing how the WCRC could enter into a *processus confessionis*.

“In Psalm 11:3, faced with a seemingly insurmountable crisis the Psalmist asks, ‘If foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?’” said Ferguson. “As a global *koinonia* called to communion and committed to justice, how specifically are we called to be a communion in these foundation shattering times? Discerning, confessing, witnessing and being reformed together. Verbs in the present tense. Verbs that incarnate what we are called to do as a global family, as regional groups, and as member churches—a Reformed community always reforming according to the word of God.” ●

# Possible general secretary candidates receive advice

**G**eneral Secretary Chris Ferguson will complete his term of service to the WCRC in August 2021. The Executive Committee will elect the next general secretary during its meeting in May 2021, and a General Secretary Search Committee has been established to recommend a nominee.

As part of the search process, three key leaders in the Communion offered their thoughts and advice to potential candidates for the position:

## President Najla Kassab



“The Communion’s role is to hear our members’ pain and provide support on different levels, spiritually and financially,” Kassab said. “Also, the Communion is needed to continue the journey towards justice on several issues that the WCRC is involved with and to prevent the coronavirus to be dominant over all other injustices.”

“Today more than any other time the need to be connected is vital,” she said. “I believe the general secretary has a key role in building trust and motivation among churches, through making sure that the voice of the struggling is heard, and the unjust issues are tackled seriously.”

“As in many ecumenical organizations the general secretary will be challenged to keep the motivation of the churches to be involved beyond their traditional boundaries and trust that this is central to their faith,” she said. “Since many churches are facing their own challenges, they tend to withdraw to isolation. How to keep the spirit of reaching out alive for communal, ecumenical work remains a challenge.”

She also noted that, “finances are another challenge, but with commitment, clarity, and vision this can be faced.”

Thankfully the new general secretary won’t be working alone. “The general secretary is supported with a well-equipped staff, encouraging officers, supportive Executive Committee members, and a challenging strategic plan,” she said.

## Search Committee Moderator

### Yvette Noble Bloomfield



“This is time for critical leadership as the Communion will be required to offer support and guidance to member churches that are grappling not only with the pandemic but with issues that are theological, social, economic, and geo-political,” Noble Bloomfield said.

Noble Bloomfield is looking for a candidate who possesses “pastoral sensitivity and spiritual leadership quali-

ties that will enable wise decision making and robust management of the Communion.”

She also noted some personal characteristics that she feels are important for the next general secretary, including “a high level of integrity, emotional intelligence, the capacity to make wise decisions, commitment, passion, a deep understanding of self and others, the ability to inspire others, be an articulate communicator, possess tolerance, and is naturally humble.”

## General Secretary Chris Ferguson



“We really are called to communion and committed to justice—and that’s very satisfying,” said Ferguson of his job, “as is bending into the fact that this is a global family that really matters to its members and that is really centered in its core mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“One of incredible parts of the job is the synergy in discernment. This really is the priesthood of all believers, where the secretariat and governing bodies have a unique opportunity to create a strong community of action and discernment,” he said.

Considering challenges facing the general secretary, Ferguson said, “We are the largest Protestant world communion that for reasons of both our identity and circumstances has the smallest infrastructure and staff. One of the challenges is the enormity of the task with the scarcity of resources.”

“We have a very ambitious vision, a small staff, and a diverse body,” he explained. “Diversity is our strength, theology and faith matters, what we do matters to the life of our churches. Sometimes we’re better, and sometimes we’re worse at working through our diversity to get to a common place.”

“As the general secretary, you’re always trying to sharpen the plan you’ve got, implement the plan you’ve got, and set the processes that will lead to the next plan,” Ferguson said, in reference to the WCRC Strategic Plan, based on decisions taken at the 2017 General Council.

“We are trying to incarnate a global *koinonia* which understands itself in this period to be marked by discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed together,” said Ferguson. “We actively try to engage our members locally, nationally, regionally, and globally through these four verbs. The general secretary is always particularly impacted by the trajectories that are two-fold—what builds and strengthens ourselves as a communion and how we have an impact and relationship outside.” ●



Chris Ferguson

## From the General Secretary

# Embracing the advent of watchful discernment

*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgement comes forth perverted.*

*I will stand at my watch-post, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.*

—Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-3

**T**his Advent and Christmas even as we welcome the Good News of Jesus Christ and Emmanuel, God with Us, the bad news just keeps coming. We would be betraying those who suffer, are oppressed and dying. Betraying those who are rising up and demanding justice. Those who reach out and care and build stronger community, if we did not confront the truth of our situation.

Mourning, lament, protest, and deep fatigue join us with prophet Habakkuk in both spiritual and material desperation as the COVID-19 pandemic has served an "apocalyptic" purpose in the New Testament sense: To expose, reveal, unveil, and make plain what is going on in our lifetime, in our historic circumstance worldwide. The death-dealing crises facing people and planet before COVID-19 persist and are getting worse. Ecological destruction, economic oppression, racism, authoritarianism, and patriarchy driven by militarized empires. A world order serving the greed of 1% at the cost of life of the rest of the world and creation itself. Then comes a world pandemic with more death and pours fuel on the fire of our failed and exploitative world (dis)order.

How could we not bend and fold in bone-shattering weariness and yell with Habakkuk, "Violence! Will you not save us?"

Contrary to an easy set piece answer about "waiting patiently for God's answer" or Advent as an anticipation of the Good News which is definitely going to arrive on the 24th of December without fail, both Habakkuk and John's Gospel bend into the reality of current suffering and let the enormity set in. They embrace waiting not as simple, passive biding of time but actively, arduously, and alertly watching, detecting and discerning how God is acting and answering from and within the pain and suffering.

Advent is a collective time of alert discernment, from the perspective of the weary, the dispossessed, the afflicted, the victims of violence. It is the "watchtower" of collective suffering, from the margins of power and privilege that the vision is made plain.

In the prologue to John it is made clear that the "world"—the social order of the Roman Empire—"did not know," could not detect that Life, Light, and God, was in the sense of the Greek text, "camped out among us" in the flesh no less.

As a global koinonia we meet Christmas 2020 exhausted, but true to the deep moving of the Spirit the struggles of this past year and the burden of grief and the uprising of resistance to racism and authoritarianisms and ecological, economic, and gender injustice has become for our worldwide family a watch tower of discernment. We are gifted to read the signs of the time from the places in which we are. To actively receive the plain vision of God in our midst, mobilizing us for life, justice, and peace. Detectable through the eyes of the dispossessed. We have met and will continue to meet virtually to uphold each other in prayer and to discern, confess, and witness

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