

Reformed communiqué

Articles in English, Español, Français

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Encuentro virtual del Comité Ejecutivo fija rumbo para el futuro

El Comité Ejecutivo de la Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas (CMIR), reunido en modalidad virtual por primera vez en dos años por causa de la pandemia del COVID-19, aprobó un plan de liderazgo de transición, estableció grupos de trabajo para la sostenibilidad y para la organización de la próxima Asamblea General, adoptó una Política de Justicia de Género, agradeció al Secretario General saliente Chris Ferguson por su servicio, y preparó un mensaje para los miembros y socios.

El texto de Ester 4:14, “En un momento como éste...” puso el marco a sus deliberaciones. Utilizando este texto, la Presidenta Najla Kassab invitó a la Comunión a renovar la imaginación de cara a los diversos desafíos de la Comunión y convocó, también, a vivir una esperanza radical.

“Vivimos en esperanza cuando la vida de Jesús se manifiesta en nosotros y en nosotras. Como Comunión renovamos nuestra imaginación inspirada en la esperanza allí donde nuestro Señor sigue caminando con su pueblo hacia un mañana mejor”, manifestó Kassab.

El Mensaje del Comité Ejecutivo (disponible en inglés, francés, alemán y español) refleja ese mismo espíritu, al tiempo que señala la situación del mundo:

La pandemia del COVID-19 desenmascaró las injusticias que afectan al mundo, ya sean sociales, políticas o económicas. Puso en evidencia la desigualdad, la explotación y la opresión que están arraigadas en los



sistemas económicos y abusó de la dignidad de las personas allí donde la atención médica y otros derechos fundamentales solo están disponibles para quienes pueden pagarlos. Casi en todas partes, las personas más vulnerables, pobres y marginadas son las más afectadas por la enfermedad y por las medidas de control de la enfermedad.

Ante esta situación, convocamos a toda la Comunión y a todas las personas de buena voluntad a unirse a nosotros y a nosotras para discernir “¿Qué exige Dios de nosotros y de nosotras?” (Miqueas 6:8). Este proceso se esforzará por establecer una comprensión teológica fresca y renovada sobre la crisis actual. Esperamos que esta práctica de discernimiento común lleve a toda la Comunión —local, regional y global— a una respuesta teológica profética y a determinadas acciones de testimonio que expongan la verdad ante poder, reclamando justicia.

Al adoptar una Política de Justicia de Género, el Comité Ejecutivo buscó impulsar la visión de la CMIR, que apela a vivir su llamado a la comunión y su compromiso con la justicia, habilitando e invitando a las iglesias a participar en la misión transformadora de Dios en términos de justicia de género y de compañerismo. Ésta política busca abordar las desigualdades e injusticias de género dentro de la Comunión y en las iglesias miembros.

El Secretario General saliente, Chris Ferguson, cuyo mandato culmina el 31 de agosto próximo, recibió el agradecimiento por sus siete años de servicio. Se presentó un *Festschrift* en su honor, que estará disponible en breve en la próxima edición de *Reformed World*, la revista teológica de la CMIR.

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En su informe al Comité Ejecutivo, Ferguson expresó su “gratitud a nuestro presidenta y a los directivos, a los y las miembros del Ejecutivo y a todas aquellas personas de las regiones, redes y comités con quienes he tenido el placer de servir”.

Al no haber presentado el Comité de Búsqueda ninguna candidatura para la Secretaría General, el Comité Ejecutivo aprobó un periodo de transición de un año, que comenzará el 1 de septiembre. En él se establece que los tres secretarios ejecutivos actuales (Hanns Lessing, Philip Vinod Peacock y Phil Tanis) asumirán las funciones y responsabilidades de la Secretaría General, junto con la presidenta, la Mesa Directiva y los y las miembros del Comité Ejecutivo que se designen.

“El período de interinato permitirá un nuevo modelo de responsabilidad compartida en el cual la participación de los oficiales, integrantes del Comité Ejecutivo y de los liderazgos regionales será vital”, expresó la Presidenta Kassab en su presentación al Comité Ejecutivo.

Durante el período de transición también se trabajará en la planificación de la próxima Asamblea General, prevista para el año 2024; en esfuerzos para garantizar la sostenibilidad de la CMIR a corto, medio y largo plazo; y en la continuidad del Comité de Búsqueda de candidaturas para la Secretaría General, cuyos nombres se presentarán en la reunión del Comité Ejecutivo de mayo de 2022.

El Comité Ejecutivo se reunió virtualmente a través de Zoom, del 25 al 28 de mayo pasado. Se prevé una segunda reunión virtual del Comité Ejecutivo durante 2021 hacia finales de noviembre, y se están elaborando planes para una reunión presencial en mayo de 2022. ●

Executive Committee approves interim plan, leadership model



A “collegial general secretariat” will lead the WCRC during a year-long interim period, beginning 1 September.

The WCRC Executive Committee, which met virtually 25-28 May, approved an interim plan that mandates the three executive secretaries take on the functions and responsibilities of the general secretary, along with the president, Officers’ Committee, and Executive Committee members as assigned.

“The interim period will allow a new model of shared responsibility where the involvement of the officers, executive members, and regional leaders will be vital,” said President Najla Kassab in her address to the Executive Committee.

The interim plan was put forth by outgoing General Secretary Chris Ferguson and the Officers’ Committee due to three factors: 1) Ferguson’s term of service ends on 31 August, 2) the General Search Committee has not presented a candidate for consideration, and 3) there are concerns over the financial sustainability of the WCRC’s core budget—the latter two of which were compounded by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The leadership model of the “collegial general secretariat” will see the WCRC’s three executive secretaries—Hanns Lessing (Evangelical Church of Westphalia), Philip Peacock (Church of North India), and Phil Tanis (Reformed Church in America)—reach decisions through consensus, while coordinating work in their particular areas of responsibility.

Even as the three assume additional responsibilities during the interim period, the programmatic work of the WCRC will remain a priority. The “COVID and Beyond” discernment process was noted as an example of how synergies between programmatic areas can be enhanced online while also involving people around the world.

“We look forward to the interim model which hopefully will allow new participation and new imagination in building a stronger communion,” said Kassab. “This plan will allow a stronger participation from the regions and more involvement from the Communion churches and leaders.”

The interim period will also see focused work on planning for the next General Council, anticipated in 2024; an effort to secure the short-, mid-, and long-term sustainability of the WCRC; and the continuation of the General Secretary Search Committee, with a candidate to be presented at the May 2022 Executive Committee meeting.

For legal and representational issues Lessing was also designated as “acting general secretary” from 1 September, but as a “first among equals” with specific responsibilities but not additional authority within the collegial general secretariat. ●

La présidente Kassab appelle à un renouveau de l'imagination

Dans son discours devant le Comité exécutif, la présidente Najla Kassab a cité le Témoignage de Wittenberg pour lancer un appel à une « imagination renouvelée » afin de construire « une Communion forte, une Communion prophétique, une présence percutante à chaque endroit qui souffre. »

« Une imagination renouvelée pour la transition » prend en compte plusieurs facteurs : la fin du mandat du secrétaire général Chris Ferguson le 31 août, l'absence de nomination d'un candidat pour lui succéder au poste de secrétaire général, et les préoccupations concernant la viabilité financière du budget de base de la CMER.

Une proposition pour une période intérimaire d'un an avec les trois secrétaires exécutifs agissant en tant que « secrétariat général collégial » a été avancée - et sera présentée en détail mardi pour examen. Mme Kassab a déclaré à ce sujet : « La période intérimaire permettra de mettre en place un nouveau modèle de responsabilité partagée dans lequel la participation des membres du bureau, des membres de l'exécutif et des dirigeants régionaux sera essentielle. Cela permettra une plus forte participation des régions et une plus grande implication des églises et des dirigeants de la Communion dans le fonctionnement du modèle transitoire. Nous attendons avec impatience le modèle intérimaire qui, espérons-le, permettra une nouvelle participation et une nouvelle imagination dans la construction d'une communion plus forte. »

« Une imagination renouvelée pour confesser » s'est concentré sur le processus de discernement « COVID et Au-delà » où la Communion s'efforce d'établir une compréhension théologique renouvelée et actualisée de la crise actuelle, à travers un large processus de discernement concer-



nant la crise actuelle et de fournir une réponse théologique prophétique pour aller vers une Communion confessante », a déclaré la présidente.

« Nous nous sommes confrontés aujourd'hui au défi de trouver une nouvelle imagination pour soutenir le travail de la Communion », a-t-elle déclaré. « La viabilité est une expression de l'engagement, des relations, de l'appropriation et de la communion approfondie. La viabilité est au cœur du renforcement de la communion en tant qu'objectif. » Plus tard au cours de la semaine, le Comité exécutif discutera d'une proposition concrète visant à créer un groupe de travail sur la viabilité.

« L'un des objectifs essentiels de la communion est d'inviter les personnes marginalisées à la table de la communion », a déclaré M. Kassab, en parlant d'une « imagination renouvelée pour l'inclusion. »

« At a time of distancing the world is challenged with how to mend the distancing culture. We are challenged to renew our imagination in inviting all those who are distanced and to continue dealing with the injustices that have lasted too long, » she said.

Elle a fait remarquer que la CMER a été un pionnier en matière de justice entre les sexes, mais qu'il reste encore du travail à faire, notamment en ce qui concerne l'embauche d'une secrétaire exécutive, pour laquelle des fonds ont déjà été collectés.

« La pandémie de Corona a révélé la fragilité de la vie humaine et le besoin de nouvelles spiritualités qui traduisent notre théologie réformée en un témoignage chrétien contemporain ; encourager le renouvellement du culte chrétien et de la vie spirituelle au sein de la tradition réformée ; renouveler un engagement de partenariat dans la mission de Dieu par le culte, le témoignage, le service diaconal et le travail pour la justice, travailler au renouvellement de la mission, à son renforcement et à la coopération dans le ministère », a-t-elle déclaré.

« Le renforcement du travail régional reste au cœur de l'imagination renouvelée », a déclaré Mme Kassab. « Le Conseil général a réaffirmé l'importance des régions au sein de la CMER, et leur rôle central dans le renforcement de la communion entre les Églises en offrant des espaces de dialogue et d'action ; et dans le travail programmatique pour améliorer la participation des Églises de toutes les régions en affirmant des styles de travail qui augmentent la synergie entre les niveaux local, régional et mondial. »

Elle a conclu en disant que « l'imagination renouvelée est inspirée par l'espoir. Nous sommes dans l'espoir que la vie de Jésus se manifeste en nous. En tant que Communion, nous renouvelons notre imagination inspirée par une confiance dans le Seigneur qui poursuit son chemin avec nous pour un avenir meilleur. »

Le comité exécutif de la WCRC s'est réuni virtuellement via Zoom du 25 au 28 mai pendant quatre heures par jour, avec des participants répartis sur 16 fuseaux horaires.

Le Témoignage de Wittenberg est un accord conclu entre la CMER et la Fédération luthérienne mondiale, lors de l'Assemblée Générale de la CMER en 2017. ●

Webinar on ecumenical dialogues looks to future

A webinar on “Justification and Justice: The Journey of the WCRC from Columbus to Notre Dame” gathered nearly two dozen participants to trace “the steps of a journey on which we’ve made momentous advances in the unity of the church—making that unity more visible in our life together,” as host Anna Case-Winters said.

The recent dialogue processes between the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and both the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church, through its Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (PCPCU), were detailed by dialogue team members.

Priscille Djomhue noted that the goal with the Lutherans “was to seek ways to encourage more visible unity between Lutheran and Reformed churches around the world” which included exploring possibilities of common actions and statements.

This dialogue produced the report “Communion: On Being the Church” which itself was the basis for the Wittenberg Witness, a statement affirming the WCRC and LWF’s common call to continued renewal and cooperation, which was signed on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Wittenberg.

“Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice,” the report of the latest Catholic-Reformed dialogue, was a stepping stone toward the WCRC signing the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), at the same worship service in Wittenberg during the 2017 General Council.

“The journey from Rome to Wittenberg” not only provided continuity with past dialogues with the Catholic Church but it also incorporated the “need for practicality to ensure statements move beyond mere theory to practical aspects,” said Benebo Fubara-Manuel.

“Justification must be seen in concrete action, grounded in God’s own action for justice in the whole of creation,” said Reinerio Arce. “Sanctification impels the Christian community to act for justice. It is

What does it mean to be in dialogue with a Reformed church always reforming?”

“Our long-range hope is for full communion” with all Christians, said Case-Winters. “In one sense, unity is already ours in Christ. It is the gift of God; we do not create it and cannot destroy it. Our divisions, nevertheless, obscure our unity and hamper our witness.”

“It is not be enough to appeal to the unity we have spiritually or the unity we will have eschatologically.

Living Out the Unity that We already Have

This mission-oriented understanding of *koinonia* has influenced the way how the WCRC engages in the building of ecumenical relationships.

It taught us to place our understanding of the unity of the church in the horizon of the *missio dei*:

World Communion of Reformed Churches

Called to communion, committed to justice



clear that we as churches share the conviction that justice and justification are inextricably joined in life by faith. We stand together on this. The imperative for justice flows necessarily from justification and from the call to the whole church for holiness.”

But the webinar was designed to do more than present an overview of the WCRC’s past dialogues. It was also a launching point for the next phase of dialogues, as well as a deepening of the ongoing ecumenical partnerships already established.

“This idea of where to go from here has to do with the fact that we no longer approach dialogues as if there is a storehouse of Reformed ideas,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary. “Instead, we are actually sharing a living tradition.

How can we be effective in the ministry of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us unless we ourselves are reconciled to one another? Unity is, as we say, not only a gift but also a calling. Can we find new ways of being church together?” she asked.

Participants in the webinar included members of various ecumenical dialogue teams, as well as several ecumenical guests. Regular meetings are planned to continue the discussion. ●

Indigenous leaders illuminate vision of a new world economy

Indigenous leaders from around the globe shared their vision for a just economy—one that will not usher in genocide, displacement, and exploitation.

During a webinar organized through the New International Financial and Economic Architecture initiative (NIFEA), they spoke on the collusion of capitalism, colonialism, and Christianity, and shared how indigenous communities are well-suited to lead the ecumenical movement in seeking alternatives to the world's death-dealing systems.

Chebon Kernell, director of the Native American Comprehensive Plan of the United Methodist Church (USA), said the webinar was able to “pinpoint and recognize some of those systems that are in place in society that have contributed to the conditions of our people.”

Mari Valjakka from the Sami tribe in Finland, offered a critique of how even environmental movements were practicing “green colonialism” in which indigenous lands were being appropriated in the name of climate justice and green energy. “We need climate justice, and that is urgent, but there is no climate justice if there is no justice for Indigenous people,” said Valjakka.

Elvira Rumbaku spoke of state suppression of the West Papuan indigenous people by the Indonesian government, noting how capitalistic ideology works by enforcing a dominant knowledge system and that indigenous knowledge systems are denigrated because they are not compatible with “Indonesian nation building.”

Jacobed Solano, an indigenous woman from Panama, spoke of the colonialism that tries to kill the indigenous spirit. “We can understand the meaning of earth as not just a territory, an element which is isolated,” she said. “We are part of it



International climate march during the United Nations climate summit COP22 in Marrakech 2016. Photo: IvarsKupcis/WCC

therefore, and this colonialism which is part of our territory favours violence.”

In a round of responses to the initial presenters, others spoke of how one could draw from indigenous resources to find alternatives.

Inatoli Phughoto Aye, a Sümi woman from Nagaland in India, spoke of how the tradition of the “feast of merit” is a concrete example of an economic alternative that resists the notion of accumulation and is instead based on generosity for the whole. She noted that this “broke the cycle of the accumulation of wealth... and is a form of the taxation of the rich.”

The webinar was held in conjunction with the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which has a theme of “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: The role of

Indigenous People in Implementing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.”

NIFEA is an initiative of the Council for World Mission, Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, and World Methodist Council. ●

Essays invited for Lombard Prize



The WCRC, in association with Lombard, Odier & Cie, Bankers of Geneva, Switzerland, invite young people to participate in the WCRC Youth Network's call for essays.

The focus of theological education on ministerial formation, rather than ecumenical formation, has resulted in narrow denominational and ecclesial visions that have moved away from an ecumenical commitment, particularly an ecumenical vision that is committed to learn from the margins.

Thus, the theme for the essays—*Ecumenism from the Margins: Confessing a God of life in a world fallen among thieves*—is meant to elicit the thinking of young people and generate a discussion on how a future ecumenism can be conceived. It asks young theologians to engage with the processes and programmes of the WCRC, particularly the “COVID and Beyond” discernment process.

Essays written in English of between 5,000 and 6,000 words are due by 15 December 2021. The top two essays—as judged by a panel of eminent international theologians from the editorial board of *Reformed World* and young people—will receive both cash awards (of 600 and 300 euros respectively) and scholarships to the next Global Institute of Theology, planned for 2022. These two essays, as well as select others, will be published in a special edition of *Reformed World*.

Format and rules:

- The essay will illustrate a familiarity with the Reformed tradition, theology and ecumenism and demonstrate a grasp of the theme and work of the WCRC.
- The essay will be written in English.
- The length of the essay will be between 5,000 and 6,000 words.
- The essay will be submitted electronically in Word format to: reformed.world@wrc.eu
- The essay will be accompanied by a statement from the author declaring that she/he is the author of the paper.
- The essay will be accompanied by notes and a bibliography which clearly indicate sources quoted in the paper.
- Submissions are open to theological students or pastors 35 years of age or younger.
- The essay will be submitted no later than 15 December 2021.

The WCRC, in association with Lombard, Odier & Cie, offers a prize for a theological essay in memory of the late Georges Lombard, associate of the bank. The aim is to encourage theological work in the tradition of Reformed thought that responds to challenges of our time, bringing together elements of faith and theology in dialogue with justice and peace issues and mission in the world—all central themes of Reformed witness. ●

Reformed World returns

After a longer than expected hiatus, *Reformed World*, the WCRC's theological journal, has returned with a pair of editions released simultaneously.

During the two years between the last issue and now the editorial board was reconstituted and the journal's "aim and scope" updated:

Reformed World is an international journal that provides a forum for sharing and debating theological studies and prophetic witness that seek to engage and transform the realities of our time. The journal draws on, widens, and deepens the treasures of Reformed sources, past and present. *Reformed World* purposefully and joyfully embodies a diversity of voices and contextual perspectives, inspired by ecclesial, academic, and grassroots communities. In the understanding of *Reformed World*, theological studies include the biblical, historical, systematic, and practical, as well as reflections on visual art, music, poetry, and other expressions of the human mind and soul that aim at the transformation of the world.

In doing so, *Reformed World* is committed to the mission of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) to be a global *koinonia*, covenanting for justice, and marked by discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed together. The journal also strives to receive impulses from and give impulses to the wider ecumenical movement, working together with all the partners God provides.

"This has been a lengthy but important process, as we took the time needed to reset the mission of journal to better serve the entire Communion," said Hanns Lessing, WCRC executive secretary for communion and theology and *Reformed World* editor. "We were also pleased to bring together a board of eminent international theologians to serve together."

The first of the two editions—volume 69, issue 1—features the most recent ecumenical dialogues between the WCRC and three other Christian communions: the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, and the Pentecostal World Fellowship.

The edition—the production, printing, and distribution of which was supported by a generous grant from the Protestant Church in Switzerland—not only includes the full reports from each of these dialogues but accompanying essays which place the dialogues in context and explore various aspects of each. The issue also reflects on the history of *Reformed World*.

The second of the two editions for 2021—volume 69, issue 2—is a *festschrift* in honor of outgoing General Secretary Chris Ferguson.

"We hope that the papers published in this issue will challenge and encourage the commitment of Reformed churches to communion, justice, and mission as we celebrate the contribution and legacy of Chris Ferguson," noted co-editors Jooseop Keum, Philip Vinod Peacock, and Lessing in their introductory editorial.

Reformed World is published twice yearly by the WCRC. Complimentary copies are sent to leaders of WCRC member churches, along with many others. Paid subscriptions will be again accepted in the near future. Issues may also be freely downloaded from the WCRC website: wrc.ch/theology/reformed-world •



Messages of urgency brought to “COVID & Beyond” process

The third “circle” of the World Communion of Reformed Churches’ (WCRC) “COVID & Beyond” discernment process concluded with an online meeting on Wednesday, 4 August.

“We are gathering all that we have heard over the last two months, placing it before this group, and attempting to discern forward particularly in terms of what we as a Communion and as member churches can do together,” said Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness.

Themed around “witnessing” and held during the period of Pentecost, this circle included presentations from and about NIFEA (New International Financial and Economic Architecture), human sexuality, youth, AIPRAL (Latin American), CANAAC (Caribbean and North America), and NEAAC (Northeast Asia).

Springing from the story of Pentecost in the Book of Acts, Allan Boesak drew parallels with the Roman Empire of that time and today’s world, calling on the Communion to be inspired through the Holy Spirit.

“The church may not be ‘expert,’ but we know that without the love of God which calls for solidarity, compassionate justice, and respect for the rights and humanity of others, our world will perish. We know that without the radical politics of Jesus our politics is no more than calculated casuistry that leads the world from disaster to disaster,” Boesak said.

“Disease, political power, peace, human rights and climate change, and economic instability are major forces driving the development of the region,” said Yeuh-Wen Lu, former WCRC vice-president from Asia and a member of the Presbyterian



Photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

Church in Taiwan. “We lament those who died because of COVID-19, and we mourn those who passed away because of natural disasters caused by the dramatic weather. We honour those who were sentenced to jail simply because they wanted to defend both the freedom of speech and the democratic politics they used to have. We remember those who are struggling for their daily lives because of the economic recession.”

“So much harm, so much ‘terrible distress’ has been done to peoples and the beautiful world of North America and the Caribbean—in the name of Jesus—that we are hard pressed to think that any sort of response from churches could be seen as trustworthy,” said Angela Martins, convenor of the CANAAC Steering Committee.

In North America critical issues presented were systemic racism and the historic and continuing abuses of Indigenous people, while in the Caribbean environmental justice and caring for creation were raised as urgent issues to address.

“COVID-19 is testing whether we are willing to make sacrifices in choosing how we live in order that others may live,” said Norbert Stephens of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

Dario Barolin, AIPRAL executive secretary, listed seven critical areas where a vital church is needed: international interference, impoverishment and the concentration of wealth, climate crisis, migration, state-sponsored violence, gender violence, and continuous catastrophes—which lamentably are every day events—including in the environment and politics across the region.

“Our urgent call is not to feel that we have lost, that we are the victims—it is to articulate a new, regional ecumenics to seek following the love of Jesus Christ,” said Barolin.

“Young people have been affected by the pandemic in the sense that they have learned to live and grow up in the midst of this crisis. Many young people have also learnt to live with loss during this pandemic, loss of loved ones, loss of affection, loss of a sense of touch and loss of stability both on the economic and emotional front,” summarized a presentation by the WCRC Youth Network.

“To be reformed is to be restless” is what strongly resonated among the youth. But there was a mourning that the church, stuck in its traditions and practices, was reluctant to change with the changing context; that the church was good at reaching out in charity but was unable to address questions of structural and systemic change. This was felt particularly in the context of climate change and ecological crisis.

“We need to reclaim religion as inclusive and disallow using violence against anyone. Is it possible to reconcile the gender-diversity gulf in our Communion?” asked Beth Symes, addressing human sexuality.

Asir Ebenezer, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of India, suggested that the Communion and its members could follow the guidance of “four L’s” when discussing human sexuality: Listening, Learning, Loving action, and Leaning on God’s grace for guidance and being slow to condemn.

“Perhaps like no other crisis before it, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the fragility of human life, the preciousness of health, and the essentiality of care,” said Athena Peralta, the World Council of Churches program executive for the economy of life. “This crisis presents an incredible opportunity for deep reflection and transformation.

“Overall, NIFEA calls for fresh systems of global governance and

policies rooted in justice, care, and sustainability and creating an environment where such initiatives can take root and flourish,” said Peralta.

Boesak urged the Communion to, “Ask the Pentecost question: ‘What must we do?’ This is the answer. Stand where God stands; fight for justice, fight for the poor, the excluded, the defenceless. Let that spirit of wildness and boldness loose upon the world. ‘This Jesus who has been taken up from you in heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’ (Acts 1:11). The same place where that violent wind comes from; the same place where the wildness was born; the same place from where the boldness has been loosed, not to settle on the head of only one, but all of you; to burn in your hearts and on your tongue so you can set the world on fire for the justice of the coming reign of God. So on the lips of the angels, all the many, many, words spoken on that great day, come to mean just seven: ‘Trust the Spirit: Be wild! Be bold!’”

More information on the “COVID & Beyond” discernment process can be found at wcrch.org/require. ●

Grateful, Blessed, and Challenged

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“Confessing the God of Life in a world fallen among thieves.” We have embraced the four verbs that shape our identity and action: discerning, witnessing, confessing, and being Reformed together.

The WCRC is in a time of transition. A time of intense discernment indeed with the “COVID and Beyond” process. An interim period of securing a sustainable future and a team of three capable colleagues serving as a Collegial General Secretariat to guide us through this special and turbulent time.

Great gratitude to Phil Tanis, Philip Peacock, and Hanns Lessing as they assume such a special challenge. I am sure they will receive the full and eager support of our whole Communion. We have a change in administrative structure with Anna Krüger serving in an expanded role as Administrator for Finance and Sustainability. Amritha Peramulla also in the expanded role of Administrator for Projects and Programs. We welcome Godwin Muoneke as the new Administrator for the General Secretariat.

The COVID pandemic has made plain the life-threatening crises that were already besetting people and planet. Now we are called to respond by living into Micah’s vision: Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

I leave office grateful and blessed and challenged. It has been a privilege to serve and be part of a global family afire with God’s promise that all should have life ...abundantly. ●

Webinar focuses on global racism

A recent session of the United Church of Christ (UCC) web series “Wednesdays with the World” highlighted the global problems of racism, xenophobia, and all forms of discrimination. It featured Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness, in conversation with Karen Georgia Thompson, UCC associate general minister for global engagement and operations and co-executive for global ministry.

Peacock framed his presentation historically, looking at how race has not always existed as a social construct.

“Even if there were forms of discrimination based on certain phenotypes, these were not necessarily the ways in which racism expresses itself today. So, I begin with the simple idea that race in its present form is actually connected to modernity and Western enlightenment thinking,” said Peacock.

He elaborated on how each race was given particular propensity, saying, “This propensity for civilization also was at the same time legitimization for colonialism, along with Christianity, of course. So, colonialism used a theory of race to justify its colonialism activities of removing resources from all over the world and bringing them to the so-called centre of the world—and justifying it because it was on a colonizing mission.”

Peacock further articulated that Reformed theology is the theology of both the oppressor and the oppressed. The WCRC’s struggle against racism arose in South Africa during apartheid and can be seen manifested in The Belhar Confession.

“This document raises three important issues of how [we] should deal with the question of racism.

These are the questions of unity of all the people in the church and the world, reconciliation, and justice,” he said.

Concluding the session Peacock spoke about the theology of election, which feeds a theology of racism. He shared the story of a woman in the Bible who was a racialized minority in terms of her ethnicity, but she was also a slave and a woman. The story of Hagar and Sarah is significant in that it shows “the birth of something new offers the opportunity of a new relationship evolving, one that is based on justice and love. But this is exactly what does not happen.

“And time and time again our nations and communities have had these opportunities to birth something new. We had it at independence, both in the USA and in India. We’ve had it in the Black Lives Matter movement. We’ve had it in the number of civil rights movements, and once again now with what COVID is exposing, we have it again, but instead of using these moments to start something new, rather we retreat back into our communities and harden the lines around races,” said Peacock.

The “Wednesdays with the World” webinar series highlights the ways in which the quest for justice is intersectional and global, allowing UCC members greater opportunities for increased awareness of global concerns and highlighting options for advocacy and action. Live streamed each week, the episodes in the series are also posted to the UCC YouTube Channel. ●

Tax justice key agree economists and church leaders

Addressing the upcoming G20 International Taxation Symposium, a webinar brought together economists, activists, and church representatives to explore how tax justice and reparations—as called for in the ecumenical Zacchaeus Tax (ZacTax) campaign—could help the world attain a just and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has revealed huge imbalances in the capacity of countries to respond to the crisis, said Manuel ‘Butch’ Montes, senior advisor at the Society for International Development and a member of the Ecumenical Panel on the New International Financial and Economic Architecture initiative (NIFEA).

“Rich countries increased their public spending...while many developing country governments increased their foreign borrowing but spent much less on health response and economic mitigation,” he said. The result is that “while advanced countries are on the road to recovery, the crisis continues to deepen in poor countries.”

The situation calls for a “COVID-19 tax on the rich and large multinational corporations,” Montes argued.

“Given the situation of global economic inequality where the increase in wealth of the richest ten billionaires since the pandemic began is enough to lift everyone out of poverty as well as offer everyone a vaccine is evidence enough why we need a system of just taxation,” said Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC

executive secretary for justice and witness. “The wealth inequality gap is immoral and just taxation is one way to fix it.”

Sharing reparatory models of tax and economic justice, Priya Lukka, an economist and researcher at Goldsmiths University, underlined the need for “land distribution, a global tax on wealth, a global minimum wage, and a global public health tax.”

Adetola Onamade and Marina Tricks, student activists who have sued the United Kingdom government for failing to meet obligations under the Paris Agreement, pointed

out that the pandemic does not exist in a vacuum. Systemic challenges such as widening inequality and runaway climate change are rooted in colonial legacies of exploitation and extractivism, they said.

Reparations are key to recovery. It must “not only be a noun but a verb,” said Onamade. Making reparations would “bring repair and health to our communities,” added Tricks.

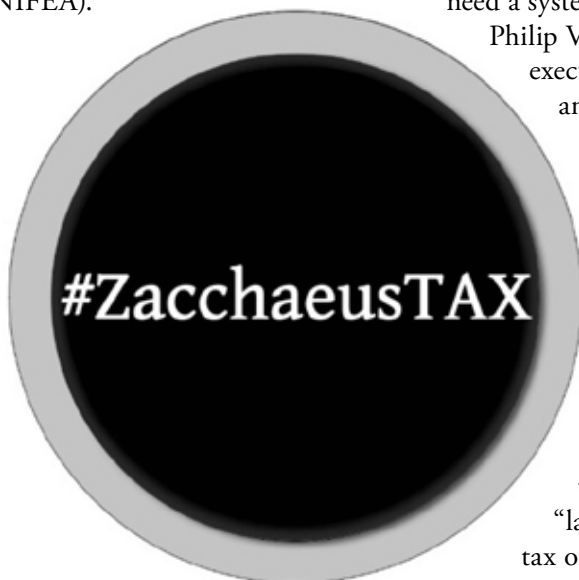
Though it is impossible to truly account for climate-related loss and damage, Frances Namoumou from the Pacific Conference of Churches expressed that “climate reparations for the loss of land, community resources and traditional knowledge” are vital for a just and sustainable recovery.

Justin Thacker, of the Church Action for Tax Justice, shared practical tips in advocating for tax justice. He underlined that “commitment is incredibly important.” The ZacTax campaign «is not a quick win...we must be in it for the long haul.”

The webinar also launched the ZacTax Toolkit. The toolkit is aimed at supporting churches in their advocacy for an overhaul of the tax system and for reparations, and will be available for free download soon.

The webinar was moderated by Gordon Cowans, former moderator of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, and closed by Gorden Simango of the All Africa Conference of Churches.

The webinar, held 25 June, was co-organized by the Council for World Mission, Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, and World Methodist Council as part of the New International Financial and Economic Architecture initiative. ●



WCRC mourns death of Allen Nafuki

The WCRC joins with those around the world mourning the death of Allen Nafuki, chief executive officer/assembly clerk of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu (PCV) and a former member of the WCRC Executive Committee.

“I always appreciated Allen’s firm support and faithful commitment to the WCRC,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary. “He brought his wisdom and insights as a Pacific Islander to all that we did, and he will be greatly missed.”

Nafuki passed away on Sunday, 13 June, with his funeral held the following day in Port Vila, after which his body was flown to his home island of Erromango for burial at Dillon’s Bay.

“We have lost a great leader who was dedicated to the work of the WCRC,” said Najla Kassab, WCRC president. “We will miss his contribution, his story, and his enthusiasm for justice. We thank God for all the gifts he brought for his church and the Communion.”

Nafuki had hoped to retire in 2020 after a decade serving as assembly clerk, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the PCV Assembly from sitting last year to choose a successor. Nafuki thus continued to serve, despite diminishing health.

“He will be a huge loss to the leadership of the PCV and the wider church. His contributions over a period of almost fifty years are immeasurable. He was a commanding presence wherever he went, and the sort of person to whom everyone turned for support and advice and leadership. So often, he dared to go where many feared to tread,” said a spokesperson from the PCV office.

Nafuki’s contributions to his church and to his country have been extensive. Over a forty year period



he spoke with a prophetic voice, always on the side of the oppressed and outcast, fighting for justice and liberation. For example, he led the national Vanuatu movement in support of West Papua independence.

“He described himself as a missionary who was committed to better life for his people,” said Kassab, who also served with him on the Executive Committee from 2010 to 2017. “He was dedicated to reconciliation in Vanuatu and was challenged to work for justice beyond the regular walls of the church. He believed his role in change and bringing justice is central to his understanding of mission.”

Following the 1980 independence of Vanuatu (previously New Hebrides), Nafuki served as the Christian Education Director for PCV (1982-1989). He was one of the founders and inspirations for the post-Independent “gospel and culture” movement.

Originally intending to train in youth ministry supported by his singing voice and musical skills, Nafuki later studied for pastoral ministry at Rarongo Theological College in Papua New Guinea from

1971-1975. He was there during the independence of that Pacific nation in 1975 and carried these hopes home to New Hebrides.

Nafuki married Idau Arua of PNG in 1975 and they had six children. Idau Arua held various administrative posts in government as well as elder leadership in the women’s activities of the church before her sudden death in 2010.

As a further contribution to his nation, Nafuki served as secretary of the Vanuatu Citizenship Commission (1990-1993) and was deputy director of the Civil Status Office (1994). He later had a period as a member of the Vanuatu Parliament (1998-2002), including some time as government whip. In 1986 he was awarded the Vanuatu Medal of Merit for his services to the church and the community, followed in 1998 with the PCV’s Golden Jubilee Certificate of Recognition and Appreciation for his leadership. ●

Calls for prayer, support, and advocacy

Canada: The WCRC joins with sisters and brothers in Canada in mourning all those children who suffered and died at residential schools across Canada.

According to *The Guardian*, “Between 1867 and 1996, the Canadian state abducted more than 150,000 Indigenous children from their parents and forced them into these schools as part of a campaign of forced assimilation. Thousands were subject to physical, emotional and sexual abuse.”

Please join in prayer and support for all who have suffered—and continue to suffer—from these unjust, racist policies of the Canadian government, often abetted by Christian organizations.

Colombia: The WCRC, along with partners, is calling for prayer and support for protestors in Colombia. According to the BBC, the demonstrations “were originally against tax reforms that the government said would be key to handling the country’s economic crisis... [but have] grown to include calls for improvements to the country’s pension, health, and education systems.”

A letter jointly signed by WCRC General Secretary Chris Ferguson and AIPRAL Executive Secretary Dario Barolin, stated, “we express our pain and repudiation of the violent repression against the popular protests in various cities of Colombia.”

“We call on the Colombian government to respect international law and the human rights of protesters. We urge the promotion of real, permanent dialogue tables to resolve the situations that are seen as urgent, namely, the withdrawal of the tax bill, and the passage of bill 010 on health, the national mass vaccination plan, and basic income.”

Cuba: The WCRC renews its call to end the blockade by the United

States of America on Cuba. Responding to the call from the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba, the WCRC calls on its members and partners “to accompany this process [a UN draft resolution] in prayer for the Cuban people, who are ultimately suffering the consequences of this policy and to make pronouncements and actions to make this problem visible.”

Meeting in Cuba in 2016, the WCRC Executive Committee stated, “Even while governments attempted to separate, erecting walls between nations and peoples, the broader Reformed church still built relationships and partnerships.”

Israel/Palestine: Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, called for peace in the present moment as well as justice for the Palestinian people. He said, “The present actions by security forces need to immediately cease and peace be restored. The status of Jerusalem as a holy city and a site for all religious traditions must be maintained while justice is pursued for the Palestinian people.”

Philippines: The WCRC calls on its members and partners to support the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) through prayer and action as it faces increasing harassment and repression from the Filipino government.

A letter from Melzar D. Labunog, UCCP general secretary, stated that the latest moves by the Filipino government to quash the work of the church are “yet another manifestation of a clear and present danger for increased repression and oppression under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 and other such laws.”

As UCCP Haran has exposed efforts to force another displacement of the Lumad Indigenous people, its bank accounts have been frozen for supposed “terrorism financing” and a warrant has been issued for the

arrest of Hamuel G. Tequis, bishop in Southeast Mindanao Jurisdictional Area. Other church workers have also been targeted for their work with the Lumads in the sanctuary at UCCP Haran.

Vaccines: Christian and other faith leaders have joined with humanitarian groups urging global leaders to ensure equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines around the world, stating that they must choose between “vaccine nationalism or human solidarity.”

A joint declaration, which calls for decisive leadership from countries and organizations across the world, states: “There is a choice. The world of the next 10 years can be one of greater justice, abundance and dignity. Or it can be one of conflict, insecurity and poverty. We are at a turning point.”

“People not only need vaccinations—they need access to health-care workers who are skilled and equipped to deliver adequate medical support. We need to build a world where each community, regardless of where they live, or who they are, has urgent access to vaccinations: not just for COVID-19, but also for the many other diseases that continue to harm and kill. As the pandemic has shown us, in our interdependent world no one is safe until everyone is safe.” ●

Chris Ferguson reflects on time as general secretary

Chris Ferguson is concluding his term as general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) on 31 August. Below is an edited interview with him.

Seven years ago you said, “Called to communion, committed to justice, the WCRC is dedicated to unity for the transformation of the world.” How has this summative statement played itself out during your time as general secretary?

You can see this has played itself out in a couple of ways. One is both a commitment to receiving unity as a gift and to really moving from a loose alliance to struggling to be a Communion, and, second, seeing the Communion’s calling to justice.

This really played itself out in the 2017 General Council when in both form and content we embraced a discernment model where in everything about the General Council that mattered, we acted as a Communion. It was about the whole perspective. It played itself out in the commitment to really embody communion values in the General Council as a moment but also as a centre of the vision and as a paradigm of how we work together.

The foregrounding of justice has really played itself out post-Council through the establishment of a strategic plan for the real transformation of the world. There was a commitment to act as a global family. We made local issues global issues. Our unity has to play itself out in real acts.

In that initial interview, you also said, “We are charged with the imperative to contribute to the wider ecumenical movement at a time when the way forward is not clear and the energies are flagging.” How has this impacted the WCRC’s work during your tenure?

At the time when I said this, we decided, rather against the trend, that we would put a lot of energy into trying to work through strengthening our inter-communion relations, and were able at the 2017 General Council to celebrate the Wittenberg Witness. And we hadn’t been part of the ecumenical conversations for many years on the JDDJ (Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification). Not only was our signing celebrated at the Council, but it has now helped form what was an agreement between the Lutherans and Catholics into a group of five, including the Anglicans and Methodists and us as well.

We took seriously the commitment to position ourselves to become members of ACT Alliance, to



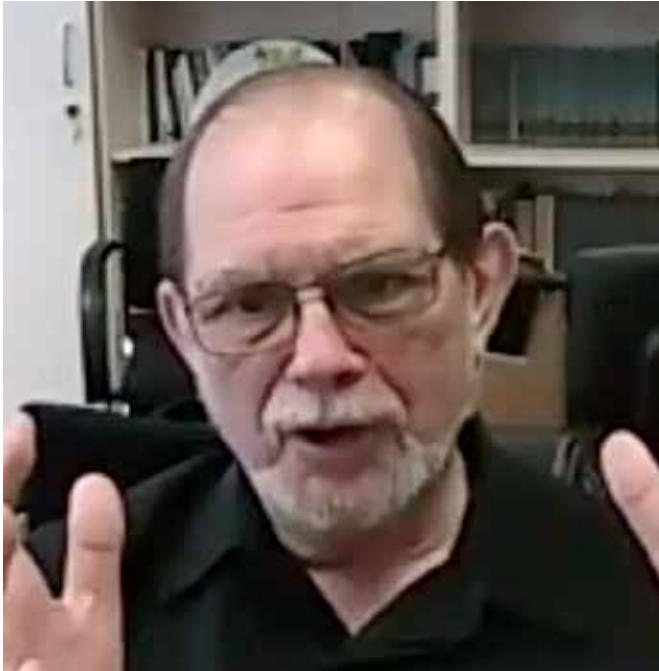
become more active members in the Global Christian Forum, in our work with the Lutheran World Federation through the Wittenberg Witness and JDDJ. It isn’t only some abstract theological commitment but the way we transform the world together.

The 2017 General Council in Leipzig, Germany, came mid-way through your term. What was the impact of the Council on your work as general secretary, as well as that of the WCRC?

The basic, positive impact was the General Council really allowed us to focus on the business of communion-building. We knew we had to use the General Council to not put everything else aside but to allow it to help us accomplish all of our other goals. So, the work of the Council became our program work. It put wind in our sails.

In that the General Council was extremely stressful, it kind of started a period to try to do the impossible with fewer resources than necessary. We developed a ferocious style and ambition by taking on too much. And we were rewarded by doing it well. It helped move us ahead—and who knows what would have happened without COVID? Part of the impact was this double-edged sword of really realizing the power and possibility of our Communion acting together to make an impact by punching above our weight.

It was an exhausting, ambitious time with many payoffs. It’s really cemented in our DNA that there is not a question between unity and



justice. Our DNA has been set to be a discerning, confessing, witnessing, reforming community. It's consolidated who we are as a Communion.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your work and that of the WCRC?

I think it's not an exaggeration: in every way. How we organize our every day work. The readjustment of our strategic plan. People are even rethinking very fundamental biblical and theological concepts. And certainly they're rethinking the how and the meaning of being church around the relationship of gathering together and the mission of the church when church meetings have been off or it hasn't been healthy or right to gather. But in a basic way, the COVID pandemic itself, most of what we did couldn't be done any more.

When you zoom out, the pandemic forced us really to understand the depth of the crisis that the world is in. It made it unavoidable and clear we were in an interlocking series of crises where the whole world community had to change its path. COVID made that clear. Basically, COVID has been for us a *kairos* moment, a moment of rethinking, rerouting.

So, we've integrated what we learned from the General Council process of discernment, from our strategic plan about being discerning, confessing, witnessing, and reforming—it's changed everything we do, in that everything we do in response to the change is that we'll do everything required, instead of the other way around.

What's been your greatest joy of being general secretary?

I really think it kind of goes back to the first question: to really see the growth in the WCRC as a confessing *koinonia*. Rather than simply supporting—which has been also important—as a membership organization, we help our churches fulfill the objectives of the organization. But now we're much more than that. We're actually a global fellowship. Examples: the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum, the great number of people who have expressed solidarity and support for the church in Colombia. Not only life and death issues. In many, many ways it has been a joy to see.

But if there was a single moment that just seemed right, it was standing with the other JDDJ groups where we had just signed the Wittenberg Witness. So, we had consolidated our relationship where communion makes a difference with the Lutherans, and then we moved to a larger table, signing the JDDJ, including with the Roman Catholics and Anglicans. The Reformed community hadn't been a part of that for years. We weren't only celebrating our part of that but adding our unique page to the JDDJ book—justice and justification—that moment was symbolically a moment of great joy.

What are you doing next?

Good question! Our plan is to continue to be active. The most we can say is that global ecumenical work will continue to be in our story. Retirement isn't the word. One of the things we do aspire to is to be in a place where we're both more settled in life and worship and service. Wherever it takes us, we have two goals: to continue to serve and be in a place where we can be for a while. ●

The quest for the WCRC's next general secretary will continue in the coming months, after the Search Committee chose not to submit a candidate for consideration by the Executive Committee.

"The reality is that whoever becomes the next general secretary will need to have particular gifts and skill sets that will enable the individual to continue to guide the theological construct and the process that will address the challenges we are currently facing, including COVID-19," said Yvette Noble-Bloomfield, search committee moderator.

More information on the search process can be found at wrcr.ch/search.



Chris Ferguson

Grateful, Blessed, and Challenged

“...And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”—Micah 6:8 (NRSV)

The only authentic way to begin this, my last message as general secretary, is with deepest thanksgiving to the God of Life.

Thanksgiving for the dynamic and life-affirming global *koinonia* that is the WCRC. For the leadership of the two Executive Committees and Officers groups. For exceptional and gifted leadership of the two presidents with whom I have had the honour to serve. Thanksgiving for the extraordinary gift of profound communion and prophetic discernment and witness at the 2017 General Council in Leipzig.

Gratitude for extraordinary staff teams who through so many changes have faithfully and competently served this worldwide communion. For the many, many people who have served on committees and dialogues and special processes, those who have represented us so ably, and who have helped construct a prophetic and visionary strategic plan. For the wisdom, courage, insight, and commitment with which the whole Communion has mobilized in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic to discern together what it is that God requires of us this moment.

Great thanks to the leadership and members of our regional councils who are at the heart of our identity and witness. To our member churches and leadership who continue, in the face of tremendous historical challenges, to affirm the value and importance of a global Christian family rooted in the Reformed tradition: “Called to Communion and Committed to Justice.”

To our member churches who continue to witness to the power of the resurrection in history in solidarity with the poor and powerless and who work in defense of the life of mother earth and all of creation.

To be Reformed is to be ecumenical, and we have been blessed with a great array of faithful partners which God has provided so we can strengthen each other in our common task. A special thanks we can see the growth of communion through the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) and in the Wittenberg Witness. We are so grateful for the ongoing partnership and hosting of our member churches in Germany and the Reformed Alliance.

After moving from Geneva, we pledged to remain active and present in the wider ecumenical family and are extremely grateful that we have moved forward with the World Council of Churches, Council for World Mission, Lutheran World Federation, and now the World Methodist Conference in the important work of NIFEA (New International Financial and Economic Architecture)—and such urgently needed initiatives as the ZacTax Campaign and the GEM School. We have joined in the efforts of the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace and the Thursdays in Black campaign to end violence against women. We are now full members of ACT Alliance.

With special support from *Evangelische Mission Weltweit* (EMW) we have strengthened our regional councils and nurtured a very successful internship program. With the faithful contribution of the *Tavola Valdese* and others we have continued to share resources through the Reformed Partnership Fund and have played a significant role in peace and reconciliation work in Israel/Palestine, the Korean Peninsula, Colombia, Cameroon, Philippines, and Taiwan. We have been able to play an active and sometimes lead role in ecumenical forums witnessing to peace and justice.

And more. And more. The challenges come as we need to find ways to sustain our Communion and move beyond our yearly deficits and financial situation where the majority of the support comes from a few churches in a few regions.

The pandemic has revealed the broken state of the world in clearer terms than ever before and in the face of that we have found guidance in our strategic plans vision:

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