



A parish of the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP) in North Sumatra threw open its doors to welcome WCRC's Executive Committee in May. GBKP hosted the committee's meeting in Berastagi, Indonesia. Photo: William Koopmans

WCRC Executive Committee worships with Indonesian congregations

By Aiko Sumichan

Congregations in Berastagi, Indonesia threw open their doors and hearts to welcome members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) on 13 May. Twenty congregations of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestant (GBKP) church hosted 41 participants from six continents who were attending meetings of WCRC's Executive Committee in the mountain community.

Ordained members of the Executive Committee were asked to preach, assisted by youth stewards and local committee members who provided interpretation into Indonesian or the local language, Karonese.

In each parish, participants were introduced to members of the congregation and answered questions about WCRC and church concerns following the service. Questions ranged from how the church could help local farmers with their struggles to how to get men to be more involved in the church.

WCRC president, Jerry Pillay, who preached at the GBKP Jl. Udara service told parishioners that one of WCRC's roles is to facilitate the exchange of stories and experiences among congregations around the world.

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“It is through events like this that we realize that even though we come from different parts of the world, each with our own traditions and cultures, we are all one in Christ and we can celebrate and worship together,” Pillay said in his introductory remarks.

Pillay, from South Africa, told the packed church that he has served as a pastor in his home country and now visits congregations worldwide to preach and talk about Christian commitment to economic justice, gender rights, and protection of the earth’s environment.

At the conclusion of the question and answer sessions,

members of each congregation invited their visitors to see some of the local sights, such as Sipiso-piso waterfall, Pagoda Berastagi park and Kawar lake. Other participants were taken to see a museum of local culture or to visit the home of members of the congregations.

Participants reported being very impressed and grateful for the hospitality shown by the congregations as well as by local people they met.

“Many thought that I was Karonese because I was wearing this,” said Salome Twum, of Ghana said as she smiled and showed the traditional clothing she received from the congregation she visited.



Young people from the Karo region of North Sumatra served as stewards for WCRC’s Executive Committee meeting in May. Most are studying theology or serving as student pastors in parishes and mission placements. Some are young ordinands. All gave unselfishly of their time, skills and good humour. Above all, they served as living witnesses to their faith and to the role of the church in the region.

Photo: Ananta Purba

Global Reformed church movement sets priorities for 2012-2013



WCRC plans "a sustainable future" L to R: Elisée Musemakweli, Yael Hadiputeri, Najla Kassab. Photo: William Koopmans

Theological formation, economic justice and measures to address financial concerns will be the focus for the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in 2012-2013. Members of the organization's Executive Committee endorsed the plans at the conclusion of a six-day meeting in Berastagi, Indonesia in May. Much of the committee's discussion focused on financial issues.

"We leave this meeting knowing what lies ahead of us in the coming months. The way will not be easy but we are committed to building a secure financial future for WCRC which will enable us to live out our vision and purpose as we engage God's mission in the world," said WCRC President, Jerry Pillay.

Representatives of the organization's member churches meeting in the North Sumatran city were told by their newly-selected general treasurer, Johann Weusmann, that WCRC's financial difficulties are due primarily to the high rate of exchange between the Swiss franc and the Euro.

WCRC's offices are located in Geneva, Switzerland and the majority of membership contributions that support the organization's operating expenses are made in Euros. The other matter of concern, the German lawyer and church executive says, is the lack of payment of membership dues by some member churches and underpayment by others.

In measures to address these issues, the Executive Committee agreed to establish a task group to prepare for a move from Geneva to a less expensive city. Funds are being sought to cover the costs of preparing for relocation. Committee members also approved a grid that establishes a fair share of membership contributions to meet WCRC's core budget.

The committee approved plans to launch a "sustainability fund" with a target of raising CHF10 million by 2017. In the first year of the campaign, WCRC has committed to raising CHF400,000. Targets

"The way will not be easy but we are committed to building a secure financial future for WCRC which will enable us to live out our vision and purpose as we engage God's mission in the world."

were set for regional fundraising in order to meet the overall WCRC goal.

The president of WCRC Endowment Fund, Stephens Lytch, acknowledges WCRC has set an ambitious fundraising objective.

"This is a huge challenge," Lytch admits. "But we all know it is necessary for WCRC to prosper. The Executive Committee has given its unanimous support for a sustainability fund and members have made a personal commitment to support it."

Programme priorities approved for 2012-2013 include plans for a major international gathering in partnership with the Council for World Mission and the World Council of Churches to consider a new global "financial architecture" that would be more faithful to Christian values of sharing and justice than the current system. The consultation is to be held in October in Brazil.

The committee approved plans to hold a training event for theology students and recently-ordained pastors in Latin America in 2014. The Global Institute for Theology (GIT) offers formation in global ecumenism to young people from around the world. Earlier sessions of the GIT have been held in Africa and North America. In June 2012, GIT will convene in Indonesia.

The WCRC is also selecting young theologians to participate in bilateral dialogues with other Christian groups such as Pentecostals and the Roman Catholic Church.

In other business, the Executive Committee approved plans to launch the search process for a new general secretary to take over from Setri Nyomi when his term ends in April 2014.



A task group to study options for relocating the office has been established.

Photo: WCRC/Cressenda Tenori

Churches issue statement on mission in Indonesia

The question of how churches in Indonesia can work together in response to social, community and environmental concerns is the subject of discussion in this country where Christians form ten per cent of the population and Muslims make up 86 per cent.

In May, 80 Christians from Indonesia and neighbouring countries gathered to consider the question at a conference in Jakarta, the country's capital. The mission event was jointly coordinated by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). Participants included representatives of WCRC's 27 member churches in Indonesia and one church in East Timor. The gathering is part of a global programme by WCRC that is encouraging similar discussions in several regions.

A statement issued at the end of the conference says: "Technological advances have shifted the traditional relationship between human beings and nature; industrial advances are turning villages into cities, while making the rich richer and the poor poorer; traditional values are being replaced with consumerism which leads to corruption; and all the while different church denominations are competing against each other thus hindering them from working together to face these issues."

The conference participants declare: "The churches are called to do substantial work... for example by allocating funds for HIV and AIDS foundations, actively work against dehumanization of people and ecological destruction, as well as developing a justified economy and other tasks."

Indigenous Batak Karo women raise funds for crisis centre



Laywomen of the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP) have built a crisis centre where abused women and their children can take shelter. Rooms in a peaceful rural setting offer refuge from stressful situations. Photos: WCRC/Greenaway

When their church told them there was no money for a crisis centre for abused women, lay women in Indonesia refused to take "no" for an answer and launched a campaign to raise funds amongst themselves.

Women from the Batak Karo Indigenous people in North Sumatra asked every Karonese woman in the country to contribute R5000 (USD1). Enough money was raised to buy a former missionary retreat centre near the city of Berastagi to serve as a temporary shelter for women and children from the surrounding area.

Today, as well as providing short-term refuge, the centre offers training in pastoral counselling, income development and human rights for women. Women pastors and lay women use the centre for a few days or for an evening as a safe haven from the dangers and stresses

of their lives.

There was urgent need for such a centre. Women in the area suffer from both physical and psychological abuse, says Rosmalia Barus, a Karonese pastor who plays a leading role in supporting women's rights in the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP).

"Men sit idle in the villages while women work 14 to 16 hours per day in the house and on the farm," says Barus. "We heard stories about abuse, did an analysis and concluded we needed a safe place for women to go."

One of the challenges is that people stay silent about abuse in accordance with their traditional culture. So the church stayed silent too. The crisis centre now stands on a hill – an eloquent witness to women's refusal to accept the silence any longer.



“It can be difficult for a female pastor to work in this cultural setting so I am very grateful to lay women. They support us as ordained women and never give up.”

Indonesian lay women offer vital support to female clergy

*Rosmalia Barus was the first woman ordained by her church.
Photo: WCRC/Greenaway*

Rosmalia Barus is a pioneer. In 1987, she became the first woman to be ordained in the Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP). Later she was appointed to head the women’s programme for the national council of churches in Indonesia (CCI). Since 2010, this member of the Indigenous Batak Karo people has been responsible for GBKP’s office for personnel where she advocates for support of programmes for children.

“It can be difficult for a female pastor to work in this cultural setting so I am very grateful to lay women. They support us as ordained women and never give up,” Barus says.

As the first woman ordained by the GBKP, Barus says she felt alone. Karonese culture is patriarchal. Men asked her to prepare coffee and tea when she was a vicar (a student minister assigned to a parish). A male candidate for ministry usually serves two years as vicar prior to ordination. She had to serve three years.

Moria, a GBKP lay women’s movement, led the way to women being ordained by making the request at every synod meeting until in 1984 the GBKP agreed. There are now 168 ordained men and 131 ordained women; 37 male vicars and 62 female vicars.

Barus’ latest accomplishment was coordinating the work of the local arrangements committee for the meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in Indonesia in May. It was the first international ecumenical meeting to be held in her home region. Barus proved her abilities as an administrator, organizer and diplomat as she juggled with competing demands from participants.

The Karonese church leader honed her skills when she served the CCI as Executive Secretary for Women and Children from 2004 to 2010. Prior to that, she served as general secretary for Moria.

Barus attributes an upsurge in female GBKP candidates between 2000 and 2005 to the fact that women saw that congregations were accepting women as pastors.

“Congregations have seen that it is not counter-productive to have women as pastors,” she explains. “Women’s ways of problem-solving are different. They deal with conflict as they do in their families. They stay at the table until a decision is made. Women try to find a reasonable solution by talking.”

Ever since women have been ordained, lay women have worked with female pastors on theological issues related to women. Barus cites examples of marriage ceremony practices that relegated women to a subservient role.

Previously the one church-approved marriage liturgy included the Ephesians reading which says wives are to obey their husbands. Moria asked for critique of that theology and women pastors presented a new draft liturgy. Discussion with male clergy about the proposed changes lasted for a year. There are now three marriage

“Women try to find a reasonable solution by talking.”

liturgies from which to choose. None are perfect, says Barus, but women pastors working with lay women have made a contribution to more equality between men and women.

Barus is now focused on concerns about children as well as women. The church has not been able to provide financial resources for children’s programming such as early childhood education in the villages. But Barus has nevertheless managed with an “infinitesimal” budget to establish 60 such groups. She hopes that WCRC will take up the issue.

“It is important that WCRC look at the situation of women and children in Indonesian member churches,” she says.

New general treasurer appointed

The Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has named a new general treasurer. Johann Weusmann of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany was appointed Saturday, 12 May during meeting in Berastagi, Indonesia.

Weusmann assumes his role at a time in which WCRC is faced with financial challenges.

“I am hoping that as General Treasurer – with the support of the Finance Committee, General Secretary and President – we will consolidate the organization’s financial situation in the immediate future,” Weusmann says.

In presenting Weusmann to Executive Committee members, WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi noted that he has been instrumental in building stronger relations between WCRC and German churches and agencies.

“Dr. Weusmann has understanding of WCRC finances and has raised the critical questions that need to be raised at this time,” Nyomi says.

Weusmann, who serves as vice-president and church lawyer for the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany, is one of the authors of WCRC’s constitution.

In an interview following his appointment, Weusmann says he accepted the appointment because he believes the organization is badly needed in a time of globalisation that brings threats to economic justice and community peace which far exceed the ability of any one church to address.

“I believe that national churches will have to work together across boundaries for unity, justice and peace. WCRC and its predecessor organizations have played a big role in helping churches connect on these issues. I hope that I can do my part for the organization to be there in the future,” Weusmann says.

The new General Treasurer will focus his attention in 2012-2013 on ensuring member churches fulfill their obligation to contribute their fair share to the general budget. Weusmann notes he participated in the creation of a “fair share grid” detailing the level of contribution expected from each member church in relation to its capacity to pay.

“I hope that if financial consolidation is successful, we can focus more on our mandate rather than on how to sustain ourselves,” Weusmann notes. “I hope in the coming years WCRC can continue to have its impact in the ecumenical world and on our member churches so that they will benefit from it.”

Weusmann replaces Gottfried Locher who resigned the position due to the burden of his commitments as President of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches. In noting Locher’s resignation, the Executive Committee noted its gratitude for his services.

Locher was appointed General Treasurer when

WCRC was founded in 2010 at the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids, United States in a merger between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

WCRC’s constitution allows for the Executive Committee to select a successor to the General Treasurer as needed in the periods between meetings of the organization’s senior decision making body, the General Council.



*Johann Weusmann
is WCRC's new
General Treasurer
Photo:
WCRC/Cressenda Tenori*



Traditional culture blends with Christianity in North Sumatra

When churches in the Karo region of North Sumatra, Indonesia began to integrate the traditional music, instruments and dances of the Indigenous Karo people into Sunday worship, church membership soared, says the head of the region's largest group of Protestant churches.

Pastor Matius P. Barus, Moderator of the Gereja Batak Karo Protestan Church (GBKP), made his comments in a presentation to the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) during its meeting in Berastagi, North Sumatra, 10-17 May.

Committee members from Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, North America, the Middle East and other parts of Asia were briefed by Barus on the history and contemporary situation of the church in Karo.

Barus told the group that in the first 75 years of Christian presence in the area, there had been few converts. Traditional music and dances were excluded

from church services and the first missionaries from the Netherlands were viewed with suspicion as colonialists.

In 1965, the Indonesian government made it mandatory for people to state their religion by choosing among officially approved religions. The traditional belief system of the Karonese people was not on the list of five faith choices: Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Forced to choose which faith to convert to, many Karonese chose the GBKP because of its openness to their traditions. Membership increased dramatically with sometimes 2000 baptisms in a single day.

Keeping a balance between including traditional customs, such as burial practices, and staying faithful to the basic beliefs of the Christian faith has not always been easy, Barus says. But discussion and study led to the creation of a manual to help pastors and church elders decide how to determine what is acceptable practice.

Today the church has 300,000 members in 489 congregations. In the Karo region, 30 per cent of Christians are GBKP. Twenty per cent of the population is Muslim. The GBKP is the largest Christian denomination in the area.

In an evening of Karonese food, music and dance following Barus' presentation, the 50 WCRC participants heard songs played on traditional bamboo instruments and watched dances depicting rice planting and harvesting. The varied programme that included a choir and dance group from local congregations was enthusiastically received.

The area's governor, Kena Ukur Karo Jambi Surbakti, welcomed the international group. Surbakti, a GBKP church Elder, was accompanied by former church leaders, the current Moderator, and the chair of the local committee that made the arrangements for the meeting.

In thanking the host church for the introduction to Karonese church history and culture, WCRC President Jerry Pillay noted the hospitality, planning and attention to detail that the local hosts had provided.

"It is this kind of gathering of local Christians and Christians from around the world that is at the heart of WCRC", he said. "It is here that we learn about each other, pray, and seek ways of supporting our sisters and brothers in Christ."



Many of the Indigenous Karonese people chose to join the Batak Karo Protestant Church because of its openness to their traditions

Photo: William Koopmans

Presbyterian agricultural project helps Cuban farmers reclaim their land

Back to the garden

by Jerry L. Van Marter

The deeply rutted road from this north coastal city up to the top of the nearby ridge makes for a teeth-rattling ride. Upon reaching the crest of the steep hill, however, one is greeted by a vast expanse of gently rolling farmland with a spectacular view of the city and the sparkling blue Caribbean beyond.

This is not just a place of spectacular beauty but of intense hope. It is called Centro Ecológico Diaconal, or “Demari,” by the peasant farmers who come here to learn and practice “spiritual ecology.”

Four years ago Demari was just a dream. The land up here had been abused during the Soviet period – from shortly after the Castro revolution in 1959 until the collapse of the Russian empire in 1990. Soviet-style agriculture included the clear-cutting of vast stands of timber to make room for large collectivised, mechanised farms. When the Soviets left Cuba in the early 1990s, they took their disastrous methods and by-then antiquated equipment with them, leaving Cuban farm workers with very little.

“Now,” says Ofelia Ortega, Demari’s original dreamer, “from our faith we are bringing them things they haven’t had – faith, love, hospitality, self-respect and self-development.”

In recent years, as the Castro government began to reinstitute private property ownership and encourage entrepreneurial agriculture, peasant farmers began to return to the land. From her base at the Evangelical Theological Seminary (SET) in Matanzas, where she served as president and still teaches, Ortega swung into action.

In the fall of 2007, Ortega founded Demari, which she still serves as director, with modest funding from the seminary-related Christian Institute for Gender Studies (ICEG), which she also founded.

Demari soon acquired the ridge top farm and began working with local farmers to assess their needs and respond with programmes and resources designed to help them rebuild a small farm economy in the area around Matanzas.

“Our main target and goal is not production on this farm,” says Carlos Leon, who along with his wife, Rita Rubio, serves as Demari’s coordinator. “Our purpose is diagnostic, to help the farmers identify and resolve the problems they have. We’re teaching them how better to live with the land.”

More than 120 small farmers have formed a cooperative and use Demari as their base for training,



Church-supported agricultural centre in Cuba encourages “spiritual ecology.” Photo: PCUSA

capacity-building and community organizing and development.

Over its four years Demari has grown to become one of the most innovative agricultural projects in the country. The farmers of the cooperative have reforested 14 hectares (140,000 square meters) of land that was clear-cut during the Soviet period. Four windmills have been erected that extract deep water from the land. Five new bio-gas plants are about to go into production, converting animal waste into fuel rather than letting it contaminate land and water.

As Demari enters its fifth year, Ortega hopes for more visitors – Cubans and Americans. “A lot of people don’t understand the situation with the farmers here and what our centre is trying to do, so support from the churches is limited,” she says. “But the peasants know what this means for them, so we encourage churches to come because when they see, they understand.”



*Carlos Leon and Ofelia Ortega
Photo: PCUSA*

*Partnership Fund:***The wheels on the bus go round once more**

*Church programmes in Matanzas, Cuba were hampered by lack of transportation until WCRC's Partnership Fund financed repair of a bus engine.
Photo: Erick Coll*

In 2011, the Partnership Fund helped the Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Cuba to replace the engine in a minibus. Two decades earlier, it helped to buy the bus.

Cuba in the 1990s struggled to adapt to a suddenly changed world. But the Cuban church never loses its hope, creativity and imagination. Believing that real change happens at the grassroots, it sought a new way of working for the true transformation of local communities.

Leadership development was central to this effort – but hampered by lack of transport.

The 21-person Toyota Coaster allowed the congregation in Matanzas and its pastor Carlos M Camps to take lay trainers and a choir to parts of the church they

otherwise could not reach. For 17 years, it did sterling service.

And then the engine died.

Happily, a modest grant from the Partnership Fund put the bus back on the road again. Today, it serves groups of all ages and enables the Christian Institute for Gender Studies to conduct training workshops in many communities.

“Each seat, each window, each tyre of the minibus preserves the history of a congregation that said no to despair,” writes Ofelia Ortega, director of the institute. “Born again, the old bus may boldly face every new challenge.”

Nominations invited for prize promoting women in church leadership

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is issuing a call for nominations for a prize encouraging women to become leaders in their church.

The Sylvia Michel Prize is awarded once every two years to a woman in the Reformed church movement who provides exceptional leadership in promoting opportunities for women to serve as leaders in their church and community.

A prize of USD5000 is awarded to an organization or individual working to encourage women to assume leadership positions in their church or investigating unequal opportunities for men and women to become

leaders in WCRC member churches around the world.

The award is named for Europe's first female church executive president. In 1980, Sylvia Michel became the first woman to be elected as the church council president of the Cantonal Church of Aargau, Switzerland.

A jury consisting of the women presidents of Reformed churches in Switzerland and the executive secretary of WCRC's Office for Justice and Partnership select the winner.

The 2013 prize winner will be announced in November. The prize will be awarded at a ceremony in Geneva, Switzerland in March 2013.

Applications should be submitted prior to 31 August 2012. The entry form and eligibility criteria are available at www.wcrc.ch or by contacting SMP@wrc.ch

“... a remarkable woman leading a significant faith community ...”

First Sudanese Woman Ordained in Australia

Amel Manyon is the first South Sudanese woman to be ordained into the Uniting Church Australia (UCA), a World Communion of Churches member church. Amel becomes minister of the newest Uniting Church community, the Uniting Church Northern Suburbs Dinka Speaking Faith Community. She was ordained 18 March at a service accompanied by a Sudanese youth choir.

The Moderator for the Uniting Church in SA, Rob Williams comments: “Amel is a remarkable woman and we are thrilled to have her leading such a significant faith community which joins together the people of Sudan in worship utilising their native language.”

Despite the vast differences in location, culture and history, strong links exist between Australia and South Sudan. Australia welcomed many people from South



Amel Manyon is the first Sudanese woman ordained into the Uniting Church of Australia. Photo: Uniting Church of Australia

Sudan as refugees during the years of civil conflict and many of these refugees have brought their skills back to South Sudan to help build the new nation.

UCA is currently entering into a new partnership in South Sudan with the Presbyterian Church of Sudan (PCOS). In late February, Kerry, along with Geoff Dornan, International Programmes Coordinator from the Relief and Development Unit, travelled to Kenya and South Sudan to meet with leaders from the church and its development arm, the Presbyterian Relief and Development Agency (PDRA).

Uniting Church of Australia

Polish Lutheran and Reformed strengthen their cooperation

The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland reports that an agreement on the mutual admission of believers to active participation in the life of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and of the Evangelical Reformed church was signed in February.

The agreement describes the regulations of membership for Evangelical Reformed Christians in Lutheran congregations and the Lutherans in Reformed congregations. It also addresses questions of voting rights of members of one denomination at congregational meetings of the other denomination.

The signing of this agreement is an answer to the situation that believers of both denominations in Poland find themselves in when they move from their home communities. Reformed Christians cannot always find a congregation in their area. The nearest congregation might be Lutheran. The same is true for Lutherans who may find that the

nearest church is Reformed.

The Reformed and Lutheran Churches in Poland have been working together ecumenically for many years. As early as the 19th century there were attempts to start a consistory for both churches. These however have not come to fruition.

Both denominations belong to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (known as Leuenberg Church Community before 2003). This means that both churches acknowledge each other's sacraments (baptism and eucharist) and allow one denomination's believers to take part in the sacraments of the other. It also provides the opportunity to do pulpit exchange (exchange of clergy).

The signing of this agreement allows members of the two denominations the full functional rights in the Lutheran and Reformed church while keeping their confessional identity. The agreement does not foresee a union between the churches.

Worshiping the Triune God: *Responding to God*



Photo: WCRC/Cressenda Tenori

This article is the fourth in a series introducing “Worshiping the Triune God,” a working document published following the inaugural meeting of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in June 2010. The document is a series of “proverbs” designed to provoke ongoing discussion about the nature and function of Christian worship.

Every moment of our life is a response to God. Every thought, every action, every reaction moves us closer to God or further away. What has your day been like so far? Have you noticed God’s presence? Or have you been so focused on surviving the day that you need to consciously pause to realize how close God is to you at this very moment?

We hit that same “pause button” in worship services whenever we have the opportunity to respond to God through prayer and the sacraments. As a community at worship, we share confession and hear God’s word proclaimed within a prepared liturgy. But when it’s time for us to respond to God, worship becomes intensely personal. No one else can do it for us. We alone can express our sense of gratitude or indifference to God.

Worship leaders must understand that these are the moments in worship over which we have no control. We can create opportunities for response and provide means and methods, but we cannot influence the act of responding. This is the worshipers’ time to respond.

This set of proverbs describes spirit-filled response.

Praise and Gratitude

Blessed is the church that offers praise and thanksgiving not only for the beauty and glory of God, but also celebrating all that God has done throughout history.

Praying through the Spirit

Blessed is the worshiping community that prays in and through the Holy Spirit, desiring the gifts of the Spirit, and acknowledging that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.

Full Range of Human Experience

Blessed is the church that prays not only for its own needs, but also for the needs of the world that God so loves.

Paul Detterman is a Presbyterian Church (USA) pastor and church musician serving as executive director of Presbyterians for Renewal in Louisville, Kentucky.

Theology: What does it mean for WCRC?

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is mandated by its member churches to develop programmes based on five key directions: Mission, Communion, Justice, Theology, and Ecumenical Engagement.

Reformed Communiqué is exploring these concepts in a five-part series. Think of it as a shorthand guide to the plans for our global family in the years ahead. The word for this edition is “theology.”

By Christopher Dorn

Theology – faith in search of understanding – informs and guides all the programmes of WCRC. It can be described as disciplined reflection on God and God’s ways in human history.

For the Reformed tradition, God’s ways are revealed in the history of ancient Israel and above all in Jesus Christ. These have been recorded in the Bible and affirmed in the creeds and the Reformed confessions, providing a pattern

for understanding how God works in the church and the world.

Theology is not a discipline that belongs exclusively to ordained ministers and theologians. It is the discipline by which we try to understand our place in God’s world. It is the affirmation of a faith that is expressed in our speaking and doing, in our striving by God’s grace to become a communion that is committed to justice.

France will have new denomination with Protestant merger

After years of preparation, a new Christian denomination was formed in May in France at a meeting of two synods in the eastern town of Belfort, a location historically important in the growth of Protestantism.

The Reformed Church of France (ERF) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of France (EELF) are merging to form the United Protestant Church of France. The new entity became a reality after the churches' synods met 17-20 May, said Pastor Laurent Schlumberger, president of the ERF's national council.

"The new church begins right away juridically," he told ENInews, adding that parishes would have a year to implement the final phase of decisions and statutes before the first national synod meets in 2013 in Lyon.

The synods formally voted on all "reference texts" or constitutional statutes of the new denomination, after having approved them in principle earlier this year at an assembly in Versailles.

"We expect the new church to have higher visibility in today's society to give witness to the Good News," said Pastor Joel Dautheville, EELF president. "Union gives greater strength and authority to the church."

The reason for the merger is not for "economies of scale" but to ensure a "better witnessing of the Gospel," Schlumberger said. He acknowledged that the road to the new church has been a long one, and not without bumps.

The merger was first proposed in the 1960s, Schlumberger told ENInews, but fears by Lutherans that they might be absorbed resulted in failed talks. A new proposal was re-launched in 2001, and the decision to merge taken in 2007, "almost unanimously," he said, despite scattered individual resistance.

Some in the Protestant community have criticized the proposed new name, saying it implies this is the only Protestant church in France. But "a united church does not mean a unique (single) church," says Schlumberger.

"The name is not perfect but it already exists in other countries."

Since 2007, the Reformed and Lutheran denominations have been working on revisions and recommendations to achieve a final text that will govern the United Protestant Church's doctrine. Church leaders have stressed that the merger will not suffocate "the legitimate diversity" of their traditions.

"There is no desire for one to absorb the other, but to live together and become stronger," Schlumberger said.

In a speech at the synod meeting he stated, "We are called to witness, without being identical. This means putting Christ first, and doing it in our own way, with the freedom of accepting who we are."

The new church unites some 272,000 parishioners, of whom 250,000 are from the Reformed Church, and it comprises 456 pastors and 960 active places of worship. It brings together two different histories and styles.

The Reformed Church has its roots in the 16th century Reformation and is the largest Protestant church in France. After having their first national synod in 1559, believers faced persecution during the 17th and 18th centuries and thousands fled to other countries and regions. The current ERF was created in 1938; the doctrine is Calvinist and confessional, and the church is present throughout France except for the Alsace-Lorraine-Moselle and Montbéliard regions, near the German border.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church was formed in 1927 by parishes that had quit the main church over doctrinal disputes. It is based on the theology of Martin Luther and is present mostly in Montbéliard and in Ile-de-France. Both churches are members of the Protestant Federation of France, and had offerings from their members totalling some 25 million Euros in 2009.

Based on ENInews report

Nigerian Reformed churches appeal for prayers in wake of violence

Reformed church leaders in Nigeria are asking for prayers in the wake of attacks on Christian congregations in the central and north-eastern regions of the country.

"We ask for prayers and encouragement," says Peter Aya, General Secretary of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC).

Aya makes the request in a message sent to the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) following attacks on congregations in the Nigerian cities of Jos and Biu on Sunday, 10 June. The United Church of Christ in Nigeria (HEKAN) has also issued a call for prayers.

The HEKAN and ERCC churches, with congregations in the troubled region, are the most affected of the six Nigerian WCRC member churches.

In responding to the situation in Nigeria, WCRC's general secretary, Setri Nyomi, has expressed outrage at the way sects like Boko Haram use religion to destroy communities and cause senseless loss of life.

"Our sympathies go to the families who have lost loved ones," says Nyomi. "We appreciate what our churches are doing to reach out to peace-loving Muslims to build harmonious communities in Nigeria. We call on all our member churches to pray

(continued on page 13)

Sharing and building on overlapping concerns

Experience with HIV and AIDS equips Mpofu for regional church work

Buhle Mpofu's commitment to working with churches in response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic has prepared him well for his new role as Regional Secretary for the African region of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Mpofu coordinates a mission programme that equips congregations of the United Methodist Church in Southern Africa to respond to the challenges of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.



Buhle Mpofu is the new Regional Secretary for the African Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC)
Photo: WCRC/Greenaway

From his office in Johannesburg, South Africa, Mpofu oversees services and educational programmes designed to help local parishes address difficult questions such as how to educate people about HIV transmission and how to protect themselves. There is no easy answer to these questions and no one answer that serves all theological and social beliefs in the church.

Mpofu understands this and takes a range of opinions into account when assessing project design and potential impact. He is always seeking what will work best in a particular context in the racially, culturally and religiously diverse societies of southern Africa.

The work of the United Methodist Church in Southern Africa in developing culturally-sensitive approaches in response to HIV and AIDS is attracting the interest of interfaith and civil society groups. In March, Mpofu

(continued from page 12)

for peace in the country and for wisdom in building communities for peace in these trying times."

HEKAN's president, Emmanuel Dzigau, says the church is seeking peaceful solutions to the problems.

"The advice I give members is to pray – not to react," Dzigau writes in a cell phone text message sent following a peace meeting in the area.

ERCC was planning a day of prayer on Sunday, 17 June for victims of the violence. Parishes throughout the country were being asked to engage in prayer and fasting as well as raising funds for those who have lost property or belongings.



Photo: Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance

was asked to speak at a forum in Johannesburg, South Africa on religion and public health co-sponsored by the National Religious Association for Social Development under the leadership of the Anglican Archbishop of Capetown in partnership with the country's Ministry of Health.

Platforms such as this allow Mpofu to share information about how the church is responding to concerns about stigmatization by offering training in HIV awareness and compassionate response through a programme developed with the support of the United Methodist Church (U.S.A.). He can also point to a policy booklet on HIV that has been distributed to all parishes. The booklet draws on work done by other denominations in the region and includes a statement on condoms that provides both scientific information about their use and recognition of the church's support of abstinence as a key element of prevention.

At meetings in Geneva, Switzerland in February with regional secretaries from Northeast Asia, North America and the Caribbean, Europe, and Latin America, Mpofu noted that gathering and sharing information will be his first priority as Regional Secretary for the African Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC).

Plans are already well underway for a regional website that will allow member churches in Africa to see what WCRC is doing. Above all, it will serve as a tool for ACRC's elected representatives to stay in touch between meetings.

A proposed reorganization of the church's programmes that is to be discussed at the church assembly this June, will bring "church and society" programmes for justice, gender concerns, and HIV and AIDS into a more closely-interconnected structure. This will allow staff to share and build on overlapping concerns. Such discussions further prepare him for his role in WCRC where increasingly, theology and justice programmes are designed to complement each other.

“We need more theological reflection and praxis in eco-justice, followed by concrete faith action.”

North East Asia churches speak out on nuclear energy

The Northeast Asia Area Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) ended its 2012 Council meeting in Hsinchu, Taiwan in February with many voices calling for renewed commitment to climate justice and vigilance against the destructive power of nuclear energy.

In a keynote address on the theme “Ecological concerns and the Accra Confession,” Setri Nyomi, WCRC’s general secretary told the delegates: “Human activity is largely destroying creation rather than being the good stewards we have been called to be.”

“Our lifestyles have often led to unnecessary emissions of greenhouse gasses. Even though the world has seen report upon report indicating the dangerous path it is taking due to global warming, we do not seem to be doing much about taking better care of creation. We are holding this meeting not too far from islands which could vanish from the face of the earth.”

Nyomi asked the delegates: “How can we stay silent when the earth and its resources are being given up for destruction.” He added, “The Accra Confession including its references to the environment has implications for the lifestyles of Christians all over the world including the Northeast Asia region.”

Delegates from Korea and Japan spoke strongly about the need for WCRC and other ecumenical organizations to take up issues of nuclear energy seriously. Recalling major nuclear accidents in the world and especially the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear plant crisis, they reminded delegates that the world could be faced with a major catastrophe if critical attention is not paid to nuclear technology.

Hong Jung Lee of Korea added NEAAC and WCRC need to expand the reach of the Accra Confession to include nuclear technology concerns.

In a message to the delegates on 1 February 2012 based on the apocalyptic message to the church of

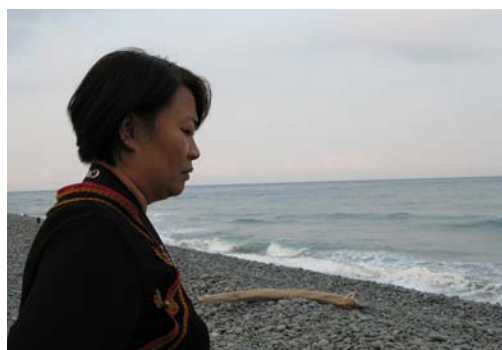


The disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant has raised concern for the region’s churches.

Laodicea (Revelations 3: 16), WCRC Vice-President Yueh-Wen Lu reminded delegates that they need to be “hot” as Christians bringing love and justice and values for making a difference in the world rather than be lukewarm and passively participate in actions that are destructive to life.

WCRC’s Northeast Asia Area Council elected new officers for the years 2012 and 2013. Yoshi Fujimori of the Church of Christ in Japan (CCJ) was elected president. The new secretary is Heo Baekki also of the CCJ.

In a presentation to the Council meeting, the outgoing President, Yang-En Cheng said, “We need more theological reflection and praxis in eco-justice, followed by concrete faith action.”



This beach on the eastern shoreline of Taiwan is possible site of nuclear waste dump. The area is home to Taiwanese aboriginal peoples. Photo: WCRC/Greenaway

Communication can lead to change, says South Korean ecumenist

Byun Chang-bae knows a persuasive message can change minds. In 1980, Byun, a Buddhist student of philosophy, encountered young South Korean Christians calling for a return to democracy following the assassination of the dictator, Park Chung-hee.

“I had been working for the very government these Christian students were criticizing,” Byun recalls. “At first I argued with them. Then I began to see that they were right to be demanding democracy.”

Byun joined the Christian student group, working with them for eight years to spread the call for democracy via banners, posters, newsletters and statements, all produced clandestinely as the government controlled the media and had clamped down on dissent. During that time, he converted to Christianity and joined the ecumenical youth movement of Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), a member church of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

“It seemed impossible that such a small protest movement could make a difference,” Byun says. “But in 1987, democracy began when there were free elections.”

However, as student protestors in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East are learning today, Byun soon saw that democracy and change do not come quickly in the wake of the overthrow of a repressive regime. Disappointed by election results which saw Roh Tae-Woo, a close associate of the deposed Korean dictator Chun Doo-Hwan, come to power, Byun resigned as an ecumenical youth leader.

Byun went on to be ordained into the PCK. In 1989, he worked at the meeting of the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Seoul. Today, the son of refugees from North Korea finds hope for the Korean peninsula in the peace initiatives of the ecumenical church movement. Currently he is working on final preparations for the opening of the Korea Institute for Future Ecumenism, a centre based in Seoul that will undertake research and offer training in ecumenism.

Byun told his story during a consultation about models of effective communication for churches held in Busan, South Korea in May. Communication specialists and staff from the World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Council of Churches, World Association for Christian Communication and Korean Christian journalists gathered to draft a statement encouraging churches to use contemporary media approaches to advocate for peace, justice and protection of the environment.



Working with Christian pro-democracy advocates led a former Buddhist to convert to Christianity. Today Byun, Chang-bae is an ordained Presbyterian minister.

Photo: WCC/Beach

The statement will be proposed for discussion at the assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to be held in Busan from 30 October to 8 November 2013. Byun served as a resource person to the consultation initiated by the Korean Local Committee for the WCC assembly.

Korean churches plan peace train

Korean churches are developing plans for a “peace train” that would travel from Berlin through Moscow and Beijing to Busan, South Korea in time for the World Council of Churches’ (WCC) global assembly in October 2013.

The plan is to draw attention to the need for peace and reunification in the Korean peninsula, the churches said. North Korea also would be on the route of the train, which would carry church and civil society representatives.

“Peace Together 2013, a committee of the National Council of Churches of Korea [NCCCK], is working with the governments on the plan,” said Chae Hye-won, Director of the Committee of Reconciliation and Reunification of the NCCCK.

NCCCK is also in early phases of discussion about how to work with the governments of North and South Korea to prepare a peace treaty to be signed in 2013 that marks the 60th anniversary of the ceasefire treaty that ended the Korean War.

The impetus for the two initiatives is the WCC assembly scheduled for 30 October to 8 November. The assembly’s program will focus on plans for interchurch initiatives on peace, justice and environmental protection in the seven-year period leading to the next assembly.

The arrival of a peace train or the signing of a church-brokered peace treaty would be a strong sign of the role of Korean churches in peace and reunification efforts. However, the initiatives do not have the unanimous support of the country’s churches. Still, despite initial controversy, representatives from churches in North and South Korea have held several joint meetings since 1984 to promote reunification issues.

ENInews

“This is a place where so many different people come together. We want to be open to the whole community.”

The Swiss Church in London celebrates 250th anniversary

The Swiss Church in London has celebrated its 250th anniversary with a multi-lingual service in the presence of Switzerland’s ambassador to the United Kingdom, Anton Thalmann. The service on 20 May was one of a series of celebrations scheduled for 2012 to mark the founding of the congregation in 1762 by immigrants from the French-speaking region of Switzerland.

“This church offers a spiritual home to the Swiss community,” Gottfried Locher, president of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, told the congregation in a sermon delivered at the anniversary service. “It is a special place for Swiss and others who like a multi-lingual, multi-cultural experience.”

Locher, who served as the congregation’s pastor from 1994-1999, is the immediate past-general treasurer of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

An estimated 240 parishioners and guests attended the service, including the newly-elected mayor of Camden, the London borough in which the church is located.

The congregation’s 250 members are divided between those who have settled permanently in London and those who are in the city for short-term assignments in the business and banking sectors or as students or mother’s helpers (“au pair” girls). There are 27000 Swiss in the United Kingdom.

In 1969, French and German-speaking Swiss congregations merged to share one pastor who leads joint services. It is the only Swiss Reformed Church in London and thus the only place where parents can have their children baptized into the Reformed church.

A well-known leader of the global Reformed church movement, Marcel Pradervand, served the parish on two occasions, first as a candidate for ministry and again during the Second World War. In 1948, Pradervand left London to take up duties with the World Council of

Churches in Geneva before accepting the call to head the global office of the World Presbyterian Alliance that later became the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Like many churches serving expatriate communities (known as “diaspora” congregations) the Swiss Church in London is experiencing a decline in membership due



*Swiss-born Nathalie Dürmüller serves the parish that is celebrating its 250th anniversary in 2012.
Photo: Jason Wen*



*The Swiss Church in London has been refurbished and is now available for cultural events while continuing to serve as the spiritual home for the expatriate Swiss community and others seeking a multilingual worship experience.
Photo: Ursula Jost*

to the combined impact of secularization and the ease of staying connected with the home country in other ways than through the church due to internet and affordable travel.

Current pastor, Nathalie Dürmüller, sees hope though in the fact the congregation is open and welcoming of non-Swiss.

“This is a place where so many different people come together,” says Dürmüller. “We want to be open to the whole community.”

The recently-renovated church in the famed Covent Garden neighbourhood is well-situated to be such a gathering space. With its central location, flexible interior design, excellent acoustics and new organ, the building offers an attractive space for cultural events and community gatherings. The anniversary celebrations in 2012 are showcasing both the congregation and the church building as places for Swiss and other cultural groups to gather and share their faith and a sense of community.

From 1939-1945 Pradervand preached every Sunday – except when the church was damaged by bombing!

Story of Marcel Pradervand brings history of Swiss Church in London to life

The story of a pastor's service to a congregation of expatriate Swiss living in London at the time of the Second World War is an interesting chapter in the history of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

Marcel Pradervand, a Swiss pastor who later served as the first general secretary of one of WCRC's predecessor organizations was pastor to the Swiss Church in London during a tumultuous period of the twentieth century. His term from 1938 to 1947 included the war years during which the city was bombed repeatedly and its Swiss residents cut off from their families in Switzerland.

Pradervand was twice on the staff of the church – from 1929 to 1932 as a student minister and again from 1938 to 1947. He moved on to serve the ecumenical movement in Geneva in 1948 when he accepted a call to work with the World Council of Churches as it was being created. In 1954, he took up the challenge of heading the initiative of heading the World Presbyterian Alliance.

Pradervand's middle son, Pierre, tells the story of his



Marcel Pradervand served the Swiss Church in London during World War II before becoming head of the World Presbyterian Church Alliance, a WCRC predecessor organization in Geneva.

Photo: WCC Archives

father's service in London during the war. For six years, from 1939-1945, his father worked alone to serve the francophone congregation as no-one from Switzerland could come to replace or assist him. This meant that Pradervand performed every baptism, marriage and funeral during that time and preached every Sunday, except those when the church was damaged by bombing! As soon as temporary meeting space was found or repairs made, the church services resumed.

During the bombing of London, the Pradervand family home was destroyed twice and damaged a third time. At the time, Pradervand and his Swiss-German wife born in England had three young sons to care for in addition to helping members of the congregation whose homes had been hit or who had lost family members. It was a time of incredible demands on the pastor yet Pierre does not remember his father ever complaining.

Pradervand dared to speak up on behalf of the Allies in an article published in a newsletter for Swiss congregations in the United Kingdom. His outspokenness earned him the rebuke of the Swiss ambassador and a warning that, because he had broken Swiss neutrality, his safety could not be guaranteed if the country fell to the Germans.

Diaspora churches such as the one in London often play a central role for expatriates. But mercifully, it is probably rare that a minister serve, as Pradervand did, under such demanding circumstances. In any case, Pradervand came to Geneva well-equipped for the challenge of being an ecumenical pioneer in a world where rebuilding relations among former enemies was to be a major focus for decades.



*Christmas worship service in post-war London, 1947.
Photo: Courtesy Pradervand family*

Silvia Adoue Renfer: Swiss foundation executive secretary says farewell

Silvia Adoue Renfer may be one of the ecumenical movement's best-kept secrets. For the past 21 years, as executive secretary of a Swiss foundation that supports Reformed church projects, she has kept a low profile, consistent with the discretion of the benevolent foundation whose activities she coordinates.

Quietly and effectively, the Fondation pour l'aide au protestantisme réformé (FAP) has supported hundreds of projects proposed by Reformed churches worldwide since it was founded in 1979.

Now as she prepares to retire in June, Renfer has agreed to be interviewed and reflect on her work with FAP. Her answers have much to say about her approach to ecumenical service. The story of her work "behind the scenes" is the story of many others like her who support the visible manifestations of the ecumenical movement in action.

Renfer, originally from Argentina, first became involved in ecumenism through her involvement in church life and because of her gift for languages. Fluent in French and Spanish and comfortable in English, she worked for more than 10 years as a freelance translator and interpreter while raising a family in Geneva.

While translating the newsletter for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and serving as an interpreter at WARC's General Council in Seoul, Korea in 1989, Renfer got to know what was at stake in global church programmes. Impressed with what she had learned, she was ready to say "yes" when Perret asked her to set up the office for a foundation to serve the Reformed church movement.

Renfer believes FAP has a specialty niche among funding organizations because of its independence from the constraints of back donors and its focus on providing financial support for Reformed church projects.

The Argentine ecumenist supports FAP's board by ensuring that applications for funds are complete

"Many people can be affected by one project. There is a multiplier effect."



Silvia Adoue Renfer has served the ecumenical movement for decades. Her retirement in June marks the beginning of a new phase in her service to the global church.

Photo: WCRC/Greenaway

and clearly presented. Once projects are approved she works with project holders to offer follow-up support. This involves establishing good links with the people who submit projects, Renfer says. She has had many opportunities to establish cross-cultural relations of trust: she estimates she has handled nearly 800 projects over the years.

"I drew on my early experience with WARC in order to understand project submissions," she explains. "I have learned that there are different approaches to issues by different churches."

She notes that attending WARC's General Council meeting in Accra, Ghana in 2004 and the Uniting General Council in the United States in 2010 was important, allowing her to strengthen links with project partners and to keep up-to-date with ecumenical issues.

As Renfer looks back over her years with FAP, she is pleased with the impact of projects supported by the foundation.

"I am impressed by how many people can be affected by one project. There is a multiplier effect. It all starts from a written submission!"

FAP's office is in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, which has allowed close collaboration with the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

"I have worked closely with three general secretaries," Renfer says.

WCRC's Executive Secretary for Theology, Mission and Communion is a consultant to the Geneva-based foundation's fund allocation committee.

After 30 years in the ecumenical movement, Renfer is not ready to say goodbye when she retires. Consider it more of a farewell.

"I'm not leaving ecumenism," she says. "I know the history and I am bi-cultural. I hope to offer my services to WCRC and other organizations in this capacity once again."

“The present global crisis is a wish for power, of which the power of money is not the least.” – Edmond Perret

Edmond Perret dies in Geneva



Edmond Perret, former General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, has died in Geneva. Photo: WCRC archives

The former general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Edmond Perret, has died aged 87 in Geneva, Switzerland. The Swiss pastor passed away Saturday 24 March.

In a statement, the general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), Setri Nyomi, pays tribute to Perret.

“The Reformed family of churches worldwide has lost a brilliant mind, a loving leader and a pastor committed to societal transformation,” Nyomi writes.

Perret served as WARC’s general secretary from 1970 to 1989. In 2010, WARC merged with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to become WCRC.

The Swiss ecumenist’s tenure as general secretary was marked by growing church opposition to apartheid rule in South Africa. In 1982, under his leadership,

WARC’s highest governing body declared apartheid to be a sin. The General Council, meeting in Ottawa, Canada, approved a statement saying that the theological justification of apartheid was heretical.

Perret was born 30 July 1925 and ordained in the Protestant Church of Geneva in 1950. Following graduate theological studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, Perret served as a pastor in The United Church of Canada from 1951-1956. His time in Canada included a two-year stint as editor of the church’s French-language newspaper. He served as President of the Synod of the Protestant Church of Geneva from 1964-1966.

Perret, who maintained close contact with the global Reformed church movement in his retirement years, never lost his sense of social advocacy.

In a video message to the General Council that launched WCRC, Perret pointed to similarities between the global economic crisis and the story of Genesis where humankind seeks control over God’s creation.

“The present global crisis,” Perret says in the video, “is a wish for power, of which the power of money is not the least.”

Perret was predeceased by his wife Simone in 2005. He is mourned by his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren as well as by his extended family.

Consider making a financial contribution to WCRC!



Photo: Erick Coll

Your financial support allows the World Communion of Reformed Churches to carry out programmes in church unity, mission, theological education, and gender, economic and environmental justice.

Together, we can equip member churches for mission in the 21st century. The action starts with your contribution today! Visit www.wcrc.ch/donations for information about how to contribute.

For stories about what we do, visit our website regularly www.wcrc.ch and subscribe to Reformed Communiqué. Subscribing to receive your free subscription is simple, just send your request to wrcr@wrcr.ch



Setri Nyomi, General Secretary
(Photo: Helen Putzman-Penet)

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Concern about the global economy and the resources available to the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and other ecumenical bodies has been very evident in recent years. And so it should be, because these are not easy times. Whether the concern centres on what is happening in Greece or Spain or whether it focuses on how a body like WCRC can survive operating from Geneva, our preoccupation with finding financial resources and with working effectively will not go away easily.

Jesus and his disciples faced the problem of inadequate resources when they saw the need to feed the large crowd that was following them. Where would they find the resources to feed those thousands? A boy's lunch of five barley loaves and two fish was hardly enough to feed one teenager let alone that huge crowd.

This sounds like WCRC. In the face of the call to facilitate the mission and ministry of 227 member churches in 108 countries representing more than 80 million Christians, we wonder what difference the limited resources we have can make.

As we seek to address the challenges of building communion in a fragmented divisive world, to stand for justice, to be at the forefront of renewing our worship and spiritual life, to facilitate the common mission of our member churches – the resources available seem like a boy's lunch when the need is to reach more than 80 million people. We can focus on the inadequate resources or we can learn from what Jesus did with the loaves: take them as an offering from the boy to be shared by the many.

In the midst of our challenges, we also hear appreciation for what WCRC has done with little. WCRC has united Reformed churches to be more effective in our witness to Christian unity, to challenge the forces that perpetrate injustice, and to facilitate how our churches engage in mission and spiritual renewal.

Recently, urged on by the affirmations of one of our strategic partners about how WCRC makes a difference in the world, the Executive Committee instituted a stabilization fund. This is an opportunity for each person to offer their five loaves and two fish so that we can stabilize the WCRC. Some may have less than five loaves and two fish, and that is alright. But many may have more than two loaves and two fish and can therefore give more.

Please go to WCRC's website – www.wcrc.ch – and offer what you have on the donations link. Some may even think of arranging a monthly, quarterly or annual donation to either the stabilization fund or to the operation of WCRC. Your loaves and fish offered will join with those of others to feed thousands and millions.

Thank you in advance for being a channel of blessing to many as that young boy who offered his lunch box was. May God bless you.

*Offering
what we have
for all
to share*

9 "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 10 Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. (John 6: 9 – 13)

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**World Communion
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committed to justice

PRAYERS ONLINE

Is your church in need of prayers? Is it concerned for the situation of churches in other parts of the world? The WCRC website has prayer resources for you. Visit www.wcrc.ch regularly for inspiration for prayer.
(John 6: 9 – 13)