



## Des engagements communs à témoigner et agir avec l'église catholique

Les relations entre la Communion Mondiale d'Eglises Réformées (CMER) et l'Eglise Catholique-Romaine ont été élargies et approfondies par une série de rencontres au Vatican, le vendredi 10 juin. Les représentants de la CMER et de l'église catholique, et parmi eux le pape François, ont nommé des raisons de se réjouir soulignant aussi l'urgence d'une coopération plus étroite.

« Ce fut autant une joie qu'une mission accomplie, d'obtenir une aussi forte réponse du pape François affirmant notre mission commune », dit Chris Ferguson, le secrétaire général de la CMER.

Dans ses propos officiels adressés au pape le pasteur Ferguson expliquait que ces rencontres avaient lieu « sous l'impression de la joie et de l'urgence ». « Notre joie vient de ce que nous savons que par la repentance et le dialogue nous nous rapprochons de l'unité qui est le don du Christ à son église, afin que tous aient la foi », dit-il, soulignant le progrès accompli par les dialogues officiels et le processus d'association à la Déclaration Commune concernant la Doctrine de la Justification (DCJ).

« Ensemble nous célébrons que vous ayez tendu la main vers l'Eglise Vaudoise et les autres signes de part et d'autre qui contribuent à surmonter les divisions par la repentance et le dialogue basé sur le respect mutuel », ajoute Chris Ferguson : « Nous sommes venus aujourd'hui pour réaffirmer de tout cœur cette vision œcuménique et notre engagement



Photo avec l'autorisation de l'Osservatore Romano, Cité du Vatican.

envers l'unité visible et le témoignage chrétien. »

« Et voici l'urgence! », ajouta M. Ferguson : « Envoyés par l'Esprit de l'Amour, de la Grâce et de la Compassion de Dieu nous ne devons pas hésiter, mais plutôt nous devons avancer ensemble et faire face aux périls et souffrances que rencontrent ce monde et l'humanité entière. » Et citant la Confession d'Accra et l'Encyclique Laudato Si, il fit le rapprochement entre l'engagement de la CMER et de l'Eglise Catholique-Romaine en faveur de la justice sociale.

« Notre foi en Jésus nous pousse à vivre la Charité à travers des gestes concrets capables d'affecter notre façon de vivre, nos relations et le monde qui nous entoure », dit le pape dans sa note adressée à la délégation de la CMER, et il y a de nombreux domaines, où les Réformés et les

Catholiques peuvent travailler ensemble en témoignant de l'amour miséricordieux de Dieu qui est le vrai remède contre la confusion et l'indifférence qui semblent régner autour de nous. »

« Nous avons grand besoin d'un œcuménisme qui, à côté du dialogue théologique qui vise à régler les désaccords doctrinaux entre chrétiens, peut promouvoir une mission commune d'évangélisation et de service », expliqua le pape François.

« Nous avons besoin de discussions théologiques, répondit le pasteur Jerry Pillay, président de la CMER, mais nous devons en même temps parler de notre service et de notre témoignage devant le monde. Je pense que c'est à cause de cette vision commune que nous sommes capables d'avoir des liens et d'être

*suite à la page 13*

# Usulan Fokus Strategis Menuju Sidang Raya

**S**ekretaris Umum WCRC Chris Ferguson mengarahkan organisasi ini menuju tahun yang sibuk secara strategis menjelang Sidang Raya 2017 dalam laporannya kepada Komite Eksekutif dalam rapat di Havana, Kuba, bulan Mei yang lalu.

“Meskipun kita mengalami banyak tantangan, namun kita tetap bergerak maju dengan semangat yang baru dalam berbagai bidang,” kata Ferguson. Tema persidangan yang meliputi pembaruan dan transformasi telah menginspirasi kita untuk tidak menyerah melainkan untuk berbalik dan memperbarui diri demi misi kita bersama.”

Ferguson menyampaikan bahwa kinerja WCRC diarahkan menurut rencana strategis yang didasari oleh rekomendasi yang dibuat Sidang Raya Penyatuan 2010 dan diterima oleh Komite Eksekutif pada tahun 2011. Rencana ini memberikan penekanan strategis terhadap lima arah kunci bagi karya dan kesaksian WCRC: misi, persekutuan, keadilan, teologi, dan keterlibatan ekumenis.

“Dalam fase akhir rencana strategis ini terdapat kesempatan untuk melaporkan keberhasilan, kegagalan, dan pembelajaran yang telah kita dapatkan kepada Sidang Raya 2017,” kata Ferguson. “Kita dapat mempersiapkan diri untuk persidangan ini dengan sebuah proposal yang terfokus untuk visi WCRC dalam periode mendatang agar dapat menginspirasi, menggerakkan, menguatkan, dan menangkat misi gereja-gereja anggota serta WCRC secara menyeluruh dalam berbagai tingkatan untuk pembaruan gereja-gereja agar dapat memberikan kontribusi secara ekumenis, antar-agama, dan bersama dengan masyarakat sipil secara global untuk transformasi dunia sebagai bentuk tanggapan terhadap panggilan dari Allah yang hidup.”

Ferguson menyampaikan usulan-usulan spesifik untuk menghadapi masing-masing arah kunci:

**Misi:** Sebuah konferensi “Misi di Garis Depan” dalam konteks agama, kekerasan, dan membangun perdamaian akan diadakan dengan memberikan perhatian khusus dalam mendukung gereja-gereja di Timur Tengah dan Afrika.

**Persekutuan:** WCRC akan mengadakan konsultasi mengenai persekutuan dan seksualitas manusia untuk



menyediakan kesempatan dan tempat aman untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana WCRC dapat memastikan terjaganya kesatuan dan memperdalam persekutuan di tengah adanya perbedaan-perbedaan pendapat dalam semangat menghargai satu sama lain serta dengan memperhatikan karunia dan perspektif Alkitab dalam tradisi Reformed.

**Keadilan:** Inisiatif Bangunan Baru Finansial dan Ekonomi Internasional (New International Financial and Economic Architecture/NIFEA) tengah diluncurkan kembali melalui berbagai kegiatan. Dalam hal keadilan jender, yang menjadi fokus

adalah keterlibatan penuh perempuan dalam pelayanan dan kepemimpinan gereja dengan laporan khusus dari kelompok kerja penahbisan perempuan.

**Teologi:** Konsultasi dengan gereja-gereja anggota terkait keterlibatan WCRC dalam Deklarasi Bersama mengenai Doktrin Pembenaan (JDDJ) tengah berlangsung dan akan meliputi pembahasan mengenai kontribusi nyata WCRC melalui penandatanganan pernyataan mengenai “keadilan dan pembenaan.” Selain itu, juga tengah berlangsung kerjasama dengan Federasi Luteran Sedunia untuk memberikan kontribusi signifikan terhadap persekutuan Luteran-Reformed melalui sebuah deklarasi bersama.

**Keterlibatan Ekumenis:** Perhatian khusus akan diberikan kepada isu-isu kesaksian publik dan advokasi yang merupakan hal penting bagi para anggota Persekutuan, antara lain di Kolombia, Timur Tengah, Sudan Selatan dan semenanjung Korea. Kerjasama erat dengan gerakan ekumene secara lebih luas, antara lain dengan Dewan Gereja Sedunia, merupakan bagian kunci dari area ini.

“Persekutuan ini hidup dan aktif,” Ferguson menyimpulkan. “Syukur kepada Allah, kita telah melihat adanya kesatuan, solidaritas, kasih, pelayanan, doa, dan kepedulian yang kuat di antara kita. Kita senantiasa dipanggil untuk bergerak menuju kesatuan yang lebih baik lagi, keterlibatan ekumenis yang lebih baik lagi, serta kesaksian publik dan transformasi keadilan yang lebih baik lagi demi kemuliaan Allah.” ●

# Transformation der Welt muss bei uns selber Anfangen

In seiner Ansprache bei der diesjährigen Tagung des Exekutivausschusses der Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen richtete Dr. Jerry Pillay, der Präsident der Weltgemeinschaft den Blick auf die bevorstehende Generalversammlung 2017 indem er auf das Thema der Versammlung „Lebendiger Gott, erneure und verwandle uns“ Bezug nahm.

„Dieses Thema ist in der Form eines Gebets zu Gott formuliert, der in der Welt lebt und regiert, damit wir Jesus ähnlicher werden,“ sagt Dr. Pillay. „Es wird dafür gebetet, dass Gott die Kirche und die Christen so macht, wie er sie haben will, und dass Gott uns dazu benutzen möge, die Welt so zu verändern, dass sie Gottes Herrschaft und Gegenwart widerspiegelt indem Gerechtigkeit, Frieden, Liebe und Fülle des Lebens für alle entstehen.“

Er fragte danach, wie sich dieses Gebet auf die Weltgemeinschaft auswirkt und nannte drei Ebenen, auf denen die Weltgemeinschaft Erneuerung und Transformation anstreben sollte:

## 1. Theologie

„Die kritische Frage lautet: Wie verstehen wir den Begriff der Gnade im Licht neuer Erfahrungen in Bezug auf die Rolle von Frauen in der Gesellschaft, auf Fragen menschlicher Sexualität, auf interreligiöse Begegnungen und Spannungen, Rassismus, Ausländerfeindlichkeit, Tribalismus, die Flüchtlingssituation usw.“ fragte Dr. Pillay. „Wie gehen wir gnädig und aufnahmebereit mit abweichenden Meinungen, theologischen Überzeugungen und menschlichen Erfahrungen um? Sie alle

drängen uns, die Notwendigkeit der Erneuerung und des Wandels anzuerkennen, indem wir danach streben, inklusive Gemeinschaften aufzubauen und bessere Beziehungen zu Menschen anderen Glaubens zu fördern. Das sind die Realitäten, mit



denen die Weltgemeinschaft umzugehen hat, und die hoffentlich theologische Erneuerung und Wandel herbeiführen werden.“

## 2. Kontext

„Auch wenn reformierte Theologie und Tradition auf denselben Glauben und dieselben Überzeugungen zurückgehen, heißt das nicht, dass sie sich in den verschiedenen Ländern in gleicher Weise auswirken. Daher brauchen wir als Zeichen der Erneuerung und Transformation eine Kontextualisierung reformierter Lehren,“ sagte er. „Unterschiedliche Kontexte sollten reformierte Theologie, Frömmigkeit und Praxis beeinflussen und prägen.“

## 3. Institution

„Auch wenn Mitgliedskirchen noch immer gerne zur Weltgemeinschaft gehören möchten, beteiligen sie sich weniger an der Arbeit der Organisation, nicht weil sie das Interesse verloren hätten, sondern weil sie zunehmend in Anspruch genommen sind durch innerkirchliche Angelegenheiten und Konflikte,“ meinte Dr. Pillay. „Ich möchte sehr deutlich machen, dass meiner Meinung nach, die ökumenische Bewegung nicht abstirbt, sondern sich in etwas Neues verwandelt. Während wir uns der Zukunft zuwenden und uns mit dem Ziel organischer Einheit auseinandersetzen, müssen wir das Bild einer aufkommenden ökumenischen Bewegung vor Augen haben, die uns dazu aufruft, uns am ökumenischen Diskurs zu beteiligen.“

Jerry Pillay fasste zusammen: „Wir müssen uns eine weitere und tiefere Sicht dieser Ebenen aneignen, während wir mit unserer Arbeit und unserem Zeugnis als Organisation fortfahren. Unsere Bemühungen um die Erneuerung und Transformation der Welt müssen bei uns selber anfangen, wenn wir im Umgang mit den Herausforderungen einer sich verändernden Welt anerkannt und relevant sein wollen.“

Der Exekutivausschuss der Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen tagte in Havanna, Kuba vom 7. bis 13. Mai 2016 auf Einladung der Presbyterianisch-Reformierten Kirche in Kuba. ●

# Stewards deepen understanding of Cuba

A WCRC Executive Committee meeting would not be what it is without the participation of stewards—young people from local churches who not only assist during the event and are vital to it running smoothly, but also give participants deeper insight into the host country’s culture and day-to-day reality, a feeling for each country and its people, their hopes and fears, that would otherwise be impossible to obtain in the short and busy week of the annual meeting.

This year, the Executive Committee met in Havana, Cuba. Its stewards were María, 33, and Alain, 25, both from small congregations in the province of Mayabeque, who show tremendous enthusiasm when it comes to participating in the social life of their congregations.



They shared their stories with participants, as well as their perspectives on the current political developments in Cuba.

María is a medical doctor, who travels five to six hours daily, on the bus in the mornings and hitchhiking back at night, from her hometown of Los Palos to the hospital in Havana where she not only works but also studies traditional medicine. Even though she arrives home only to eat and sleep, she still finds time and energy to be an active member of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba in Los Palos, where she teaches Bible classes to children and teenagers, relating their own experiences and knowledge to Biblical texts, which in return helps them to apply the newly-gained knowledge to their daily lives.

María is also a ruling elder in her church, and especially grateful to her colleagues who, Christian or not, help her out when necessary so she can reconcile church and professional life. She also takes advantage of her long daily commutes. “I carry a big bag with a Bible, an agenda, I have everything in there.” To María, all the long hours are worth it. She believes that faith teaches us to do something for others. “It’s easy to help those who surround us, that we have blood ties with, but sometimes it’s the way to do something for others who you don’t know and also need our support...That is why I belong to this church—not only because my family took me when I was little.”

She considers that the Executive Committee meeting opened a door for the Reformed Church in Cuba as “the fruit of the WCRC’s work also helps Latin American countries, and it’s very important to join globally in the face of all the difficult situations our world is going through. It’s great that everyone wants to join with a common goal to dream a little bigger.” She adds that ecumenism is essential, “an ecumenism that in Cuba also

includes the Afro-Cuban religions. The human being is above any structure that we might belong to. The fruit that we are aiming for is the same. It doesn’t matter whether we pray to Allah, Olofi or Jehovah.”

Alain agrees with María: “We are the body of Christ. We can’t be separated. We need each other. A body

can’t be divided; the heart can’t function alone and the eyes can’t see by themselves. We mustn’t focus on differences but look for the things that bring us together.”

Even though he originally studied accounting and economy at university, Alain now is a sound engineer and works at a local radio station. He still lives and works in his hometown, Güines, where he takes care of his elderly and disabled grandmother, and is an active member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Güines.

Besides having taught school children, leading worship and being a youth president of his church, he has been in charge of creating a historical archive of his congregation’s 113-year history, and organizes the church’s movie theater and discussion groups. His current big project is the creation of a documentary about his congregation that includes interviews with some of the oldest members and is currently being translated into English.

His faith is essential to his life as “things don’t have the same meaning when you look at them from a Christian point of view. When you do something for others as a Christian, it’s not a simple favour, or to look good, or because of certain interests. Doing something for the other person gives you joy. It’s a way of looking at the world with hope, with honest love.”

María voices concerns when asked about what main problems the Cuban society is facing. “Cuba has many non-productive sectors, such as health and education. To me it’s a priority for everyone to have free access to these

sectors. But it's a problem for the economy. Very few people can meet their basic needs with their salary. Parents have to make huge sacrifices."

"My dream is that Cubans will be able to smile a little bit more," she adds. "Sometimes, when I am on the bus, I notice that Cubans have lost their smiles because they are so worried about how to survive, how to lead a quality life. I also dream that Cuba will have good relations with other countries, with the United States, that they won't be afraid to be open towards new things."

Alain shares the same concerns and dreams. "My hope for the Cuban people is to be able to work and earn enough to live, to be able to buy food, shoes and clothes, the fundamental things of life, in the same month. And to have something left for hobbies. And I think those things will come. Not within the next ten years. Many things need to be built from scratch. Compared to the rest of the world, Cuba has become isolated, backward in a sense. I believe that the newly established relationship with the United States can help us, as long as they don't want to meddle in internal topics." All in all, he says: "I am calm. I am calm, because I believe that we will adopt the good but remain being ourselves, Cubans. I believe we can cast a vote of confidence."

"I am afraid, but I am hopeful. There are a lot of good people in Cuba. Many want to prepare others so that the change that will come will be good. So that people see others as their neighbours, to phrase it in a Biblical way," María laughs.

This pair of stewards certainly deepened the understanding of Cuba for Executive Committee participants, especially of young people's hopes and dreams—those young people who will help shape the new Cuba that is inevitably coming, in one way or another. ●



## Cuban churches serve communities

**T**he Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba (PRCC), host church of this year's WCRC Executive Committee meeting, is a small church, a minority in its own context and challenged daily to do good work despite the odds. In a country of 11 million people, the PRCC has 15,000 members—less than 0.2 percent of the population. The overall percentage of Protestants, in a mainly atheist country, with Catholicism and Santería, an Afro-Cuban religion, being the main religious groups, is estimated to be around 5 to 10 percent. Still, the PRCC is fulfilling its call to mission and making an impact in Cuban society that far outweighs its size.

This impact is not limited to its members. WCRC Executive Committee steward Alain points out that "the Cuban people are thankful. Everyone, members and non-members, considers the church a place of support and solidarity—something that is maybe difficult to find in other places in society."

People are coming together and share the little they have to contribute to those who have even less, and the Cuban churches play an important role carrying out a variety of social projects, some in partnership with foreign congregations.

However, especially in the regions, it is not always easy for congregations as they encounter obstacles by the local governments. "Sometimes, there is a little bit of fear of protests by the churches. In my town, for example, we asked for access to a public place for a Christmas play for five years, to send a message of hope to the people, of kindness and compassion. The local government kept coming up with excuses 'We'll see... We are going to discuss it... The venue is already occupied...' But those things could be easily solved and would benefit a lot of people," WCRC Executive Committee steward María sighs.

Nevertheless, both young people agree that, in spite of the hurdles, the PRCC is more than just holding its own.

One of the most important contributions of the PRCC churches, according to María, is training. Many congregations educate people, regardless of whether they are Christians or not, not only in theological matters, but also in citizenship rights, methodology, communication, non-violence and gender issues.

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## Comunión se compromete a solidarizarse con iglesias cubanas

La reunión del comité ejecutivo del 2016 de la CMIR terminó hoy, 13 de mayo, con una emotiva actividad enfocada en la nación anfitriona, Cuba.

Estas actividades incluyeron escribir una “Declaración desde Cuba”, visitar e interactuar con el vicepresidente Miguel Díaz-Canel y una presentación por parte de la delegación de las FARC, que actualmente sostiene negociaciones de paz con el gobierno colombiano en La Habana.

La “Declaración desde Cuba” sintetizó lo aprendido por el comité ejecutivo sobre el contexto de las iglesias cubanas y latinoamericanas e incluyó un llamado a los miembros de la Comunión.

### Conclusiones:

- “La Iglesia nos ha enseñado que la fe no es una empresa frágil sino una fuerza resistente.”
- “Aun cuando los gobiernos trataron de separar, levantar muros entre naciones y personas, la Iglesia Reformada mayor continuaba construyendo relaciones y hermanamientos.”
- “La Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba... abrió puertas internacionales a otras iglesias cubanas y sentó bases teológicas para la comprensión de la misión en ... Cuba.”

La declaración mencionó que las luchas por la justicia, los derechos humanos y la superación de la pobreza continúan en toda la región, “por ello oramos para que la democracia sea respetada, pues ella fomenta la paz como fruto de la justicia.”

Prometiendo continuamente “solidaridad y apoyo para la Iglesia cubana” la declaración hizo un llamado a la Comunión a:

- continuar con los trabajos para terminar con el bloqueo/embargo



económico impuesto por los Estados Unidos,

- construir nuevas relaciones o renovar las ya existentes con la Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba
- Orar:

*Dios de la vida, no permitas que nos pleguemos ante la perspectiva de poder del mundo: por el contrario, permítenos siempre depender de ti. Transforma nuestra fe incierta con una gracia tenaz que enfrente cada nuevo día. Renuévanos en el compromiso con nuestras hermanas y hermanos en cualquier lugar donde enfrenten retos en su vida como iglesia. Gracias por hacernos más valientes de lo que realmente somos. Oramos en el nombre de Cristo, amén.*

El Presidente de la CMIR, Jerry Pillay, y otros directivos dieron la bienvenida en la reunión a Díaz-Canel, reunión que ha sido planeada durante un año, el cual ha traído grandes cambios para Cuba y su situación.

“Cuba está abriendo sus puertas ante el mundo, así como el mundo está abriendo sus puertas ante Cuba y ahí entrevemos un potencial maravilloso”, dijo Pillay. “Cuba ha estado aislado por muchos años debido al bloqueo pero los cubanos han demostrado una asombrosa adaptabilidad tras haber sido capaces de sobrevivir. Ahora algo está naciendo y creemos

que esto impulsará a la gente de Cuba”.

Pillay y Chris Ferguson, secretario general de la CMIR, presentaron la “Declaración desde Cuba” a Díaz-Canel y exhortaron, a él y al gobierno cubano, a aprobar leyes que garanticen los derechos de todas las iglesias y religiones en Cuba.

Díaz-Canel agradeció a la CMIR y a sus miembros el gran apoyo que brindaron para dar fin al embargo, así como la defensa que mostraron en otras situaciones. “No debemos nunca dejar de mejorar el mundo,” dijo Díaz-Canel “Juntos podemos transformarlo.”

Unas horas antes ese mismo día, el comité ejecutivo tuvo noticias de una delegación de paz de las FARC. Las iglesias en Colombia y Latinoamérica están participando en el proceso de paz, trabajando para acompañar a aquellos que necesitan protección contra las fuerzas violentas que aún están activas en Colombia. El líder de la delegación de las FARC, Marcos León, dijo: “Estamos más cerca que nunca de la paz. Y contamos con ustedes, las iglesias, para que en conjunto con nuestras comunidades podamos lograr condiciones de vida dignas”.

El comité ejecutivo se reunió en La Habana, Cuba, 7-13 de mayo de 2016 y fue recibido por la Iglesia Presbiteriana-Reformada en Cuba. ●

# Statement from Cuba



**W**e, the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, have gathered here in Havana, Cuba, 7–13 May 2016, under the theme “Living God, renew and transform us.”

Following the words of the Apostle Paul, God calls us not to conform to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2).

The story of the church in Cuba is an inspiration to us. The church taught us that faith is not a fragile enterprise but a resilient force.

The church transformed the experience of difficult times into a greater dependency on God with the realization of miracles happening around them every day.

Even while governments attempted to separate, erecting walls between nations and peoples, the broader Reformed church still built relationships and partnerships. This solidarity contributed to the new life between Cuba and the United States.

The Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba provided the ecumenical world with strong leaders, opened global doors for the other churches in Cuba and provided a theological foundation for understanding mission in the struggles of the Cuban context.

We pray that this tradition of contributing to the social fabric of Cuban society will only continue to grow and that the government will equally respect all religions and churches and their unique gifts to their communities.

We respect the role Cuba has played in the Colombia peace talks. Many people in Latin America owe their health to the medical workers Cuba has trained in the region.

We also heard about the larger Latin American context with struggles for justice, specifically guaranteeing human rights and overcoming poverty. So we pray that

democracy be respected, as it nurtures peace as a fruit of justice.

We pledge our continuing solidarity and support to the Cuban church and call upon the Communion:

- To our member churches in the United States, we encourage them to continue their work to end the economic blockade/embargo
- To the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba, we encourage them to hold fast to their identity and faith while encouraging the development of young leaders
- To all of our members, we encourage relationships to be newly built or renewed and call upon all to pray:

*Living God,*

*Do not let us conform to the world's view of power but let us always be dependent upon you.*

*Transform our uncertain faith with a resilient grace that faces each new day.*

*Renew in us a commitment to our sisters and brothers everywhere that face challenges in their lives as a church.*

*Thank you for making us braver than we are.*

*In Christ's name we pray,*

*Amen.*

There is still much to be done and much to learn. We will continue to journey together. The Cuban churches' struggles are the Communion's struggles. Their successes are our celebrations. ●

# Youth opportunities available at 2017 General Council

*Three programmes connected to the 2017 General Council will help develop the next generation of church and ecumenical leaders.*



**The Global Institute of Theology (GIT)** is an intensive short-term academic programme designed to give theological students and faculty from all over the world an opportunity to learn, teach and do theology in an inter-contextual and ecumenical way, situating the theological task in local, regional and world contexts.

The GIT will be held in Wuppertal and Leipzig, Germany, from 9 June to 7 July 2017 and will offer a unique opportunity for a community of students from around the world to live together, learn and do theology in a fully inter-contextual and ecumenical way, connecting theology from the local to the regional and world levels.

The first phase of the GIT will take place in Wuppertal, near the small town called Barmen where, in 1934, in spite of the looming threat of the Nazi take-over of the German Church, Christians from all over Germany came together and made a courageous confession that only Christ is the Lord of the Church. This Barmen Confession became a symbol of the assertion that transformation comes only through the Word of the Living God. Therefore along with the General Council theme the GIT will also reflect on Confessions and Confessing Churches.

The GIT will move to Leipzig on 28 June to join the General Council. Being held in the context of the General Council will give the students an opportunity to encounter the global church and to participate with Christians from all continents in studying the Bible and worshipping together. It will also give them the opportunity to listen to and engage with eminent theologians,

social scientists and activists from various contexts and be inspired by their witness and actions.

More information and applications are available at [wcrc.ch/git](http://wcrc.ch/git)

**The Stewards Programme** places 70 youth directly in the middle of the Council itself, assisting in all aspects of the gathering.

“Stewards will make an enormous contribution to the facilitation of the Council,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary. “The General Council will be a wonderful opportunity to share in the life and witness of the worldwide family of Reformed churches. It will be a special opportunity to meet many other young people from around the world.”

#### **Stewards will:**

- be important contact persons for delegates, staff, guests and visitors in all questions concerning their stay in Leipzig
- help organize the programme, worship and trips to Berlin and Wittenberg
- take part in the international youth gathering that will take place prior to the General Council (see below)
- experience lively ecumenical fellowship with people from all parts of the world

Stewards must be between the ages of 18-30; be willing to work long hours and within a team; be able to speak English and preferably one other supported lan-



guage of the Council (French, Spanish, Indonesian, Korean, German); have some level of experience in administrative/logistical work, documentation and conference assistance; be active members of a WCRC member church and endorsed by them; and be eager to contribute to, learn from, and share in international experiences.

More information and applications are available at [wrc.ch/stewards](http://wrc.ch/stewards)

**A global youth gathering,** “Meet the World,” will begin the weekend before the General Council, on Friday, 23 June.

Participants will experience Christian fellowship through worship, Bible studies and activities. They will exchange “what it looks like to be a disciple of Christ in their unique contexts.” And they will consider how they can creatively contribute to God’s mission in the world.

**Topics to be covered include:**

- Social transformation: Social justice
- Global challenges: climate change
- Models of change: post-growth movements

Individuals aged 18 to 26, as well as youth groups from WCRC member churches, are invited to attend. Also welcome are stewards, as well as youth delegates to the Council.

Churches that have additional financial resources are encouraged to connect with their partners in other parts of the world who may need assistance in sending their own youth.

More information is available at [wrc.ch/youth](http://wrc.ch/youth) ●

## WCRC continues association process to the JDDJ

**T**he 2010 Uniting General Council recommended “a consultation within WCRC to consider the possibility of associating with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ).”

The JDDJ, signed by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999, states that they share “a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.” The JDDJ praises this consensus as an important step on the way to Christian unity. For this reason the Catholic Church and the LWF invited other churches and ecumenical bodies to associate with the declaration.

The issue of association was discussed over several years by the WCRC Executive Committee. At its meeting in Havana in May, the Executive Committee decided to proceed with an association process. The Committee also resolved that the Statement of Association should emphasize the connection between justification and justice as a Reformed contribution to future ecumenical dialogue on the understanding of justification.

A small group of theologians subsequently worked on the Statement of Association to emphasize the Reformed contributions to the common understanding of justification. The headings that structure the document point to the particular Reformed emphasis that guides the WCRC’s association with the JDDJ:

- “We hear the consensus and agree”
- “We particularly appreciate some of the distinctive insights in the JDDJ”
- “The Reformed have particular emphases and additional insights to bring”
- “We wish to underscore the integral relation between justification and justice”

This Statement of Association is being shared with member churches for feedback and comment. In December the Executive Committee will review the responses and, if the way is clear, will take action to adopt the Statement. If action is taken it will become a part of a common celebration of Christian unity at the 2017 General Council.

More information on the process to associate with the JDDJ can be found at [wrc.ch/jddj](http://wrc.ch/jddj) ●



# Syrian Christians create space for hope

In war-torn Syria, hope is fading for many. After five years of civil war, there are few who have not lost family members or close friends, but life needs to go on for those who are alive, for those who have stayed. They struggle to continue with their lives every day, to study and work,



although jobs have become scarce, and to maintain as much normalcy as possible amidst the war and the ever-present threat of attacks, while dreaming about a better future and peace.

However, as Najla Kassab, WCRC Executive Committee member and director of the Christian Education Department of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), points out: “In the Middle East, war always influences how we see each other; it clouds our view of the beauty of the other’s religion.”

So what comes after the war, how will the Syrian people, mostly Muslim but with a significant Christian minority, be able to relate to each other and reconcile as neighbours when the conflict has caused so much mistrust? How can inter-faith relationships be restored, when,

after five years, there is now a new generation growing up that has never experienced life before the war?

A group of young people, members of a NESSL congregation in Homs, Syria, have started a project to achieve just that. “Space for Hope” came to life in the fall of 2014. It is a space for children and youths, girls and boys, between the ages of 9 and 17 from the different religions and sects of Syria to come together in team-building activities.

There have been four events so far, and in the last one, that took place in September of last year, the team was able to successfully involve 180 people from the different neighbourhoods of Homs City in the yard of the Evangelical School, a place that was almost destroyed in the war, but has been rebuilt.

Twenty-one volunteers were involved in the events, all young Presbyterians from different walks of life—students, doctors, teachers, lawyers, secretaries. The reason why these young people were so enthusiastic about their project is simple: love for their neighbours, no matter their background. “We are a part of the team because we want to show the children how to smile and tell the whole world that there is a space for hope in Syria. We hope to light a peace candle around the children of Syria and hope for our project to arrive to the whole world,” they say.

“The most recent event was carried out over five weeks, two days a week for two hours each,” tells Mofid Samir Karajili, pastor of the Presbyterian congregation in Homs and co-founder of the project. “Every day consists of two sessions: the games session where we use team games to build or make up relations, and the teaching session that includes time to reflect about what we have learned from these games.

“We have learned that it is very possible, even lovely, to be with the others that are males or females, Christians, Muslims or

Alawites, in the same team to face the same challenge, to work hard to get the same target on the very same ground. This was the target of the event, to put in the minds and the memories of these youths that they can live together, regardless of their religious background and conflicts. We are also committed to make the parents of the youths feel comfortable and safe.”

“It isn’t common in Syria for children or people in general to interact much with their neighbours from other religions. Here, they forget the differences, because they want to be happy,” adds Loujain Saad, one of the young people who initiated the programme. “This project is so important because in Homs during the five years of war, kids have never seen any kind of happiness, only war, murder, weapons. This project makes the kids love each other and work with each other. It is also important for our community because we need this peace, we need to love all people in our country and say to them ‘Don’t be afraid, “Space for Hope” is here for your children.’”

Pastor Mofid Karajili is pleased with what has been achieved so far: “I think we got our targets. We know that we can’t change the world, but we can make at least one right step towards a better life. And we did that. The most important thing is that ‘Space for Hope’ became a team. We created a team that has a vision to make different events under this title, in different places that need the light of hope in these very dark days.”

A new “Space for Hope” cycle will start in September. Some new activities will be included, such as painting, sculpture making, piano and dancing. The team is currently looking for instructors in some of these fields, because, as they say: “We wish this event to be the first step of a very long episode.” ●

# News from around the Communion



## AIPRAL sets future course

**W**hile the world was focused on the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, church leaders from across Latin America gathered in São Paulo for the 12th General Assembly of the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Latin America (AIPRAL), a regional council of the WCRC.

Meeting under the theme “Help us to uphold the harmony of your Creation” the 49 delegates representing 22 member churches discerned the future path of AIPRAL and elected a new executive committee. The Assembly called for action against climate change and injustice against God’s creation, affirming its mission to speak out and alert all of humanity about the consequences of the environmental crisis.

Gabriela Mulder finished her term as president of the Alliance. Aginaldo P. Gomes, AIPRAL’s former vice president and from the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil, was elected as the new president. Darío Barolín was reelected as executive secretary.

AIPRAL welcomed two new members, the Moravian Church of Cuba and the Mexican Communion of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches. In a pre-assembly gathering, the female delegates of the Reformed Latin American family called all members to speak out and take action to combat the violence against women that claims new victims daily.

The Assembly ended with a worship service in the Evangelical Cathedral of São Paulo, celebrating AIPRAL’s 60th anniversary. Both Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary, and Jerry Pillay, WCRC president, also attended the assembly, delivering presentations and sermons.

## PC(USA) elects new stated clerk

The Presbyterian Church (USA)’s 22nd General Assembly elected J. Herbert Nelson as the its new stated clerk, the highest ecclesial office in the 1.5-million-member denomination.

Nelson, 57, is the first African-American elected to the post and has been director of the PC(USA) Office of

Public Witness. He succeeds Gradye Parsons, who is retiring after eight years as stated clerk. He was installed immediately after his election and began his duties 1 August.

“This is a powerful day, a powerful day in my life and for many people of color who did not envision the possibility of this ever happening,” Nelson told the assembly, adding he asked only one thing of commissioners: “Pray for me and work with me—and not on me—and we’ll get some things done in the name of the Lord.”

One of Nelson’s predecessors as stated clerk, Clifton Kirkpatrick, said, “J. Herbert’s election is a dream come true, not just because he is so competent, but because he’s a symbol of our commitment to diversity, and his commitment to the work and witness of the church in the world.”

Steven Kendall, principal clerk of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, said, “We have had great relations with Cliff and Gradye, and I have had a chance to talk with J. Herbert Nelson this week. I look forward to his fresh perspective and his carrying on the strong ecumenical commitments of the PC(USA).”

Kendall, Parsons, and Kirkpatrick are all members of the WCRC’s Executive Committee.

## First female pastor in Middle East approved

Rola Suleiman, a pastor of the Church of Tripoli in Lebanon, has been approved to be the first female minister of the National Evangelical Synod of Lebanon and Syria (NESSL) and likely of any denomination in the Middle East.

This “big step” by the NESSL’s board of directors also opens the door for other women to take ordained leadership roles within the church.

“We believe in the priesthood of all believers, in the sense that anyone, male or female, is a priest through his or her faith and talents,” says Suleiman, adding that the near-unanimous vote reflected “the atmosphere of support.” ●

## Cuban churches serve communities

*continued from page 5*

The congregation in Güines has come up with an innovative way to entertain and educate. As opportunities for recreation are limited in the small town, the local congregation has opened a movie theatre in its church building with a growing video library of movies, and it organizes discussion groups of the different topics depicted in the movies.

María's congregation in Los Palos is currently offering three main projects. One that is now common in many congregations is preparing free Sunday meals for the elderly. These meals are possible with in-kind and monetary donations from the community.

Secondly, the church supports a soccer project for children and youth, providing materials such as balls and garments, but at the same time inviting the same young people to church on Saturdays to talk about gender issues, violence and addiction.

The third and biggest project currently being developed is a community centre with three main areas: the sociocultural development of the Cuban society, offering spaces for debates and education, including a public library; a space for the elderly to come together and participate in activities and also to receive medication; and an area for children who do not have many formative and recreational opportunities in the present.

"This community centre is where we put all our hopes at the moment. It is still in the developing stage, and we are looking for people who would like to support this project so that in the future it may be self-sustainable," María points out.

Alain has benefited from similar projects himself. "Thanks to my church, I have received medicine that is not available in local pharmacies but limited to those that sell expensive imported products. The church serves God, but by doing so it serves the people and it has helped us immensely on this path of life and faith."



A project, initiated around Havana and Matanzas but carried out by many congregations today, is providing free purified water to all members of the community to ensure that all have drinking water that meets basic needs, such as brushing teeth and cooking, even in periods of drought.

Another area where church involvement is essential is when natural disasters occur. "Whether there is a cyclone in western Cuba or an earthquake in Santiago, the churches are there providing psychological and material support. If we need to send clothes, food or hygiene products to the affected regions, the churches

come together and deliver these goods. They also help to recover houses and rescue people trapped in the area," a member of the Presbyterian Reformed Church says.

As the Presbyterian Reformed Church is showing every day, it is not always a matter of financial means to achieve something positive for the community. If everybody contributes just a little piece, and people come together in solidarity, there is hope. Alain affirms that "it is our own will to do more. Some congregations are very poor, but many projects are based on God's word, on good deeds alone." ●

### Applicants invited for 2017 internship programme

The WCRC is seeking a young adult (30 or younger) to serve as an intern for next year, which will include the 2017 General Council in Leipzig, Germany.

The WCRC gives internship opportunities to young people aged 30 and younger from member churches to work with the organization in order to learn about global ecumenism and the issues that are central to the WCRC's mission.

More information and application forms are available at: <http://wcr.ch/leadership-development/internships>

The deadline for member church-endorsed applications is 1 November 2016.



## Des engagements communs à témoigner et agir avec l'église catholique

*suite de la page 1*



Photo avec l'autorisation de l'Osservatore Romano, Cité du Vatican.

reliés en vue d'une coopération plus étroite. »

La délégation de la CMER put aussi rencontrer les membres du Conseil pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens et du Conseil pontifical « Justice et Paix ».

La CMER a conduit une série de dialogues avec le Conseil pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens dont le quatrième vient d'être conclu avec un rapport intitulé « Justification et Sacramentalité : La Communauté Chrétienne comme Agent de Justice » qui sera publié l'année prochaine.

« Il y a un sentiment d'espoir que cette quatrième phase a provoqué une ouverture et posé quelques questions pour l'avenir, explique Aruna Gnanadason, conseillère théologique de la CMER, elle montre que notre dialogue pourrait s'orienter vers plus d'unité visible, plutôt que vers les problèmes dogmatiques, afin que nous avançons ensemble vers un engagement pratique. Nous nous réjouissons de pouvoir décider des étapes suivantes. »

« Votre association à la Déclaration Commune concernant la Doctrine de la Justification (DCJ) est d'une grande importance pour nous », a affirmé le cardinal Kurt

Koch, président du Conseil pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens, car ce sont des questions importantes pour nos prochains dialogues. Nous avons de nombreux thèmes à étudier au cours de nos dialogues et la recherche d'un témoignage commun. »

« Nous considérons 2017 comme une merveilleuse opportunité pour déclarer qu'il y a ici un signe d'unité visible et d'accord qui nous laisse avancer et travailler ensemble, dit le pasteur Pillay, nous voyons la Réforme avec sa grande diversité, ses multiples événements -Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox- et l'unité en devient une partie significative. »

La réunion avec le Conseil pontifical « Justice et Paix » était centré sur divers sujets où il y a une convergence d'intérêts communs. La large discussion a touché des thèmes tels que « l'économie de la vie », « l'entrepreneuriat vertueux » et d'autres moyens par lesquels un développement sur des bases théologiques pourrait garantir l'inclusion équitable de tous et la gérance de la création, avec de nombreuses références faites à la Confession d'Accra et à l'Encyclique *Laudato Si*.

« Il y a de nombreux domaines possibles pour une coopération –pratique, systématique et théologique », dit la pasteur Dora Arce-Valentin, responsable de la CMER pour le partenariat et la Justice : « Nous avons confiance que la possibilité que nous avons aujourd'hui de mieux nous comprendre au sujet de la justice et de la paix ouvre des chemins communs pour répondre de manière prophétique à notre vocation commune d'être les témoins de Jésus Christ en construisant son Royaume ici et maintenant, dans ce monde que Dieu aime tant. » ●

## Visser retiring after medical leave

**T**he Rev. Dr. Douwe Visser, the executive secretary for theology, communion and mission for the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), will be taking early retirement in 2017 after an extended medical leave.

The medical leave, which began in May, is due to the need for surgery on both of Visser's knees, a process that includes several months of rehabilitation and recovery. In accepting his request for early retirement, the

together and in building and cementing relationships in the WCRC," said Jerry Pillay, WCRC president. "His work in theology, mission and communion was really outstanding, especially in the days in Geneva."

During his time at the WCRC, Visser oversaw numerous dialogues with other Christian communions, including the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, both of which produced significant documents. He coordinated

"We also express our thanks to his wife Antoinette for her support and service throughout the years," said Pillay. "May God bless and keep them in all joy, love and peace. We pray God's continued strength and healing upon him and wish him well in his retirement."

To compensate for Visser's absence in the period leading to the 2017 General Council, Aruna Gnanadason has been contracted as a consultant. Her primary responsibility is coordinating the 2017 Global Institute of Theology, to be held in Germany in conjunction with the General Council. Gnanadason will also provide additional support for the office of theology, mission and communion, while specific projects from the office will be taken up by other WCRC staff members or specialists.

Gnanadason, a member of the Church of South India, served as the dean of students for the last two GITs. She served the World Council of Churches as director of its women's programme, coordinator of the Justice, Peace and Creation Team and executive director for planning and integration. She has a Master of Arts degree in English literature and a doctorate of ministries in feminist theologies from San Francisco Theological Seminary.

It is anticipated that a search for a successor to Visser will take place after the 2017 General Council.

Visser is a minister of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, serving several congregations as pastor over the years. He was twice elected vice president of the REC before becoming its president. For most of the 1980s he worked as a missionary of the Mission of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands for the Reformed Church in Zambia, doing lay training and teaching at the Theological School in Lusaka, Zambia.

The Vissers have three adult children and plan on returning to the Netherlands in their retirement. ●



Photo Credit: Peter Williams/WCRC

WCRC's Executive Committee expressed its thanks for Visser's many years of service to the organization and offered the assurance of its prayers for his good health.

"Douwe has not only been a valuable member of the WCRC's staff but has been a leader in the Reformed ecumenical movement for many years," said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary.

In 2008 Visser was appointed executive secretary for theology and ecumenical engagement in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). At that time he was also president of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). The WARC and REC united in 2010 to become the WCRC.

"Douwe played an instrumental role in bringing the REC and WARC

three of the WCRC's Global Institute of Theology, in the United States, Indonesia and Costa Rica. He also served as editor of *Reformed World*, the WCRC's theological journal, and oversaw the Reformed Partnership Fund.

"In addition to using his experience and knowledge as a theologian, Douwe also used his skill and depth of understanding of churches and their needs to lead the work of the Communion in strengthening the work of our churches in mission and development through leading the Partnership Fund," said Setri Nyomi, former general secretary of both WARC and the WCRC. "We thank God for the years of dedication that Douwe has given to Reformed churches worldwide."

## From the General Secretary

*continued from page 16*

tion afflicting the planet and the people.

The full truth of systemic racism and militarized racial injustice in the United States explodes before us. Forced migration in numbers never seen in the history of the world demand our transformative attention. Poverty. Ecological destruction. War and violence, much of which is religiously justified, only extends and spirals out of control. We all see it, suffer it and are impacted by it.

And yet I am reporting a WCRC fully embracing in the most energetic way renewal and transformation. No turning away from the hard truths. No denying reality. And yet from that embracing all the realities we as a Communion have powerfully received the gifts of the Spirit. We are called forward and lifted up by God's grace and in the following of Jesus Christ and are entirely surprised by the hope and sense of purpose and perspective that fills us with.

The text from 1 Peter calls us to account for the hope that is within. For the WCRC and our churches, in the face of almost insurmountable odds there is much. How to account for it. Well the passage from 1 Peter actually begins "Sanctify Jesus Christ as Lord." This difficult-to-explain out-breaking of vigorous hope is grounded in the certainty of knowing that Jesus came so that may have life abundant.

May these months be filled with vigorous hope as we together face tough times. ●



## Ferguson presented with Friendship Medal

Chris Ferguson, general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, was awarded the "*Medalla de la Amistad*" (Friendship Medal) from the Cuban government for his decades of humanitarian and advocacy work on behalf of the people of Cuba. Vice President Miguel Diaz-Canel presented the medal to Chris at the end of the WCRC's Executive Committee meeting that was held in Havana, Cuba.

In accepting the award Ferguson said, "You are honoring the church of Cuba, the love of their homeland and the importance of having solidarity with a church that has shown us how to survive. If I'm a friend of Cuba, it's because the church in Cuba has called us to serve."

"The award is in recognition for the solidarity and service in large part of the United Church of Canada in which I only built on the solid contribution of Tom Edmonds and which Jim Hodgson more than ably continued and deepened," Ferguson continued. "The Canadian Council of Churches were also a big part of the story as was the Canadian Food Grains Bank."

Before presenting the award Diaz-Canel thanked the WCRC and its members for their long support to end the economic blockade, as well as advocacy on a number of other issues. He noted that the Cuban government shares many of the same goals for social and economic justice as the WCRC.

"We should never stop in building a better world," Diaz-Canel said. "Together we can transform the world." ●



Chris Ferguson  
General Secretary

## FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

*Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:16).*

The last few months have been very busy and very constructive in the life of our WCRC family.

The WCRC Executive Committee had a very positive and forward-looking meeting in Havana, Cuba, in May. At that meeting we firmly focused on the 2017 General Council meeting which we will celebrate together under the theme, “Living God, renew and transform us.”

In preparing for the Council we reviewed the strategic plan that was developed in 2011 to implement the vision and priorities of the 2010 Uniting General Council held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. With all that happened in the life of the Communion such as our previous financial challenges, the move from Geneva to Hannover and a prolonged search for a general secretary we had to admit that we had not accomplished as much as we had planned to. However with a much improved financial situation, stabilized staff situation and improved office, financial, database and administrative situations we are in a very good place to move ahead confidently in the planning for a very powerful General Council and to accomplish several crucial priorities of the strategic plan which in themselves will help guarantee a very constructive and successful Council.

The final chapter of our plan focuses on very exciting developments in theological and ecumenical relationships, like the decision to consult with our churches with a view to associating the WCRC with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, a major theological and ecumenical breakthrough document of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) signed in 1999. Leading up to Reformation commemorations in 2017 we now have the opportunity to add our assent and our unique perspective. Similarly the Executive has strongly affirmed taking a next step forward with the LWF in building on the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue results received in 2014 so that we can make even more present and real our communion and strengthen our unity.

We have agreed that we will hold a series of consultation to address issues within our Communion to strengthen our life and witness and to work through issues that impede our effectiveness and faithfulness or even threaten our unity. We will hold consultations on relationships with our regional councils, a special event on “Mission on the Front-lines” with churches in situations of religiously motivated violence and Christians in minority situations. We will also seek a special consultation on communion and human sexuality, where together we will look at our differences around questions of human sexuality and how our approaches to those differences threaten both our unity and commitments to justice.

We fully embraced a document calling for a common faith stance on women’s ordination as an expression of full and equal participation of men and women in ministry.

We affirmed the importance of the Global Institute of Theology to be held just before and together with our General Council, contributing to the leadership formation of young theologians within our family.

As an expression of our commitment to justice, solidarity and the public witness to which we are called we have agreed to a special focus on the peace and accompaniment process in Colombia, peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula, the situation in the Middle East including the deteriorating situation in Israel and Palestine and the growing crisis in Syria. We have called for a pastoral visit to South Sudan and a special visit to the Korean Christian Federation in North Korea.

As you can see this is a lot and it’s not all. Moreover it is just part of all that needs to happen so that the General Council actually lives out our theme to “renew and transform.” We are embracing fully renewal. We passionately seek the real transformation of the world. We are alive, empowered and invigorated by God’s Spirit. We are hopeful and engaged despite many, many challenges, limitations and past failures.

As I said to Pope Francis in Rome during our audience in June, we come with both joy and urgency; joy for all the achievement of unity and urgency because of the situa-

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