

Address of the WCRC President to officers

Cayman islands, October 24-25, 2024

Dear Officers,

It is our joy that we are able to meet in the Cayman Islands, empowering the churches in the Caribbean and North American region, and being empowered as a communion with the work that is done in this region, celebrating the many ways that the Lord has used the church in this diverse region. **As it is well said on the website of the Caribbean and North American region, Cannac is an expression of the world communion of reformed churches in this region. With all these 22 churches as members:**

Christian Reformed Church in North America
Cumberland Presbyterian Church
Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America
ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians
Evangelical Presbyterian Church
Guyana Congregational Union
Guyana Presbyterian Church
Hungarian Reformed Church in America
Iglesia Cristiana Reformada en la Republica Dominicana
Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana
Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada en Cuba
Korean Presbyterian Church Abroad
Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church
Presbyterian Church in Canada
Presbyterian Church in Grenada
Presbyterian Church of Guyana
Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Reformed Church in America
United Church of Canada
United Church of Christ
United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

Context of the Cannac region:

The region struggles with geopolitical challenges—war, as they claim.

Cannac is committed to an ongoing intentional engagement with member churches.

Across churches, key words came up over and over and over again. These were:

1. **'Going through a season of change and restructuring.'**
2. **'Undergoing a process of thoughtful consideration and exploration of what the church's prophetic role maybe in this season and discerning how God's spirit may be guiding the church'.**
3. **At a crossroads that offers opportunity for reflection, assessment, inquiry, decision, and commitment."**
4. **'A crossroads of great hope for the future and some serious challenges.'**
5. **'Renewal of purpose; need to break away from past successes and move forward with a clear vision.'**
6. **Critical importance of global witness**

As we are meeting in the Cannac context, we recognize that we are meeting at a time of celebrating the past—20 years for the Accra confession, 150 years for WARC. Despite all we meet at a time where we are challenged with the already and not yet; with the great heritage and the challenges of the now; with reformed and reforming; with seeking new imagination, as the Wittenberg witness puts it:

Together we long for renewed imagination of what being the church in communion could mean—for our world, in our time.

We need new imagination to live together in ways that would embrace our unity not only as a gift but also as a calling.

We need new imagination to dream of a different world, a world where justice, peace, and reconciliation prevail.

We need new imagination to practice spiritualities of resistance and prophetic vision, spiritualities in service of life, spiritualities formed by the mission of God.

We are thankful that we are able to meet in person some of us and on hybrid, and thankful for the invitation of the region to worship together on Reformation Sunday 2024. Worshiping in the regions is one way of building a healthy communion. It is a strong statement of moving towards wellness regarding supporting the churches in the regions, despite the financial challenge that we are still facing. This is a strong, empowering moment that builds a deeper communion in this region.

Personal context and call:

I am happy to be with you in person after the last attacks on Lebanon. The amount of violence that I have seen in the past few weeks cannot be described by words. In the last few weeks, around 2500 civilians were killed by God. The attack is entitled as a war putting an end to Hizballah since this political group joined hands with Hamas to stand against Israel. This is the political scenario that we all hear on the news. Almost the majority of the Lebanese disagreed on launching war from Lebanon, despite wanting to see that peace happens in Palestine and the region. The story shared is that this is a simple attack towards a targeted group, but the reality is:

Any person can be targeted in Lebanon and could endanger any civilian.

Also, when hitting the weapon stores, they could throw explosive material to the neighbors.

The explosive chemicals risk the health of all the Lebanese.

The number of refugees, more than 1 million five hundred, is spread in Lebanon; many of them lost their homes.

The spread of diseases among the refugees is increasing, and winter is at the door.

The psychological health of the people is affected; people cannot sleep because of the sounds and fear;

People receive notices to evacuate areas 15 minutes before the attack, so people run to the streets just to stay alive.

The developed technology in this war is scary. We are a field for trails.

Heritage is destroyed through this war.

The youth are demotivated where many schools are teaching online.

Many families are leaving the country.

I say all this to stress that there is no way to accept war as a way of solution on all sides. **The church is called to be the strong voice encouraging diplomacy and dialogue away from killing.** This mentality of adopting war language as the call of God is seen among radical religions (Christian, Muslim, and Jewish). It Threatens humanity. Such an attitude could threaten all of us. The church is **called to be the voice for life clearly.** I hope we can lead this campaign of stopping war, whether in Gaza, Lebanon, or Ukraine. Stopping war is the real triumph. If things continue like that, we are all losers. I believe we have to work towards justice for humanity and humane living.

I want to say that living in Lebanon these days is teaching us the value of life and how fragile life could be. There is an urgent need, and we do not have much time. I hope leading a “no war, pro-life campaign” should be our voice to the world, and we need to encourage that through our ecumenical platform.

Since our last Executive Committee meeting in Grand Rapids, I cannot help but recognize the positive steps in moving forward as a communion, and I thank Setri and the staff for leading this journey. I know trying to reorganize our work in the global office has been the challenge for quite a while. I know Setri will speak more about these changes, but I want to say that we started to sense the presence of the activity and concerns of world communion through media, and hiring a new person (Annam), focusing specifically on developing communication strategy for the communion and developing the proper network, has started to bear some fruit. For example, we can see more information regarding the program work on media platforms, and preparing for the reformation Sunday worship and this will for sure encourage the expected campaign. We hope the communication strategy will prepare us well for the next General Council.

Friends, we have less than one year for our General Council. I believe it will be very helpful to start our exit plan by doing some evaluation that will help the coming leadership. I believe the last 7 years were challenging years, starting with the COVID pandemic, the financial crisis, the emerging CGS model, and the Interim Period. I have the following suggestions:

1. To reflect as officers regarding what role do officers have in the life of the Communion and how can this be strengthened.?

2. How is accountability lived and practiced? Who is accountable to who, starting with the belief that we are all held accountable, especially since we have new staff in office, strengthening the spirit of accountability and continual evaluation is needed.

3: Following up with the work suggested by the document of “the Committee” Follow-up is key.

If we look in the written documents of the WCRC since 2010, we find follow up is key. Lots of written material but not much achieved on the ground.

I would like to conclude with what was said about Gustavo Gutierrez by Hunter Farrell former director of world mission of PCUSA.

Throughout his life, Father Gustavo tirelessly and graciously lifted up the central contradictions of the Church and its theology today: — God in scripture and Jesus in his ministry loved all people, but consistently embodied a “peculiar love” for the poor and oppressed. Why don’t we?, asked Padre Gustavo. — The Church can never be a church for the poor until it is a church of the poor. Padre Gustavo saw the critical need for the protagonism, the leadership, of the poor and oppressed in the very structures of the church. — God in scripture and Jesus in his ministry consistently shaped theological reflection from the common stuff of context— local proverbs, fishing stories, veiled political commentary on the Roman occupation of the region. Why do we insist on keeping theology an exclusively intellectualized pursuit, divorcing it from its rootedness in the lived reality of the lives of the oppressed?