FROM LEIPZIG TO CHIANG MAI

2017 - 2025

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES

From Leipzig to Chiang Mai

27th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches

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Chiang Mai, Thailand
14 October – 23 October 2025

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is a global fellowship of Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, United and Uniting churches, representing more than 230 member churches and 100 million Christians worldwide. The WCRC brings together churches in covenant communion to strengthen unity, foster renewal, engage in mission, and promote justice in the economy, ecology, and gender relations.

Opinions expressed in WCRC publications are those of the authors.

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Preface

For many decades the WCRC and its antecedents have had the tradition of producing an account of our lives between the last General Council and the next. This is the time for us to present a similar document that we would normally entitle "From Leipzig to Chiang Mai". This time around, since the Chiang Mai General Council coincides with our 150th anniversary, we have decided to add a chapter at the beginning that revisits our journey prior to our last General Council in Leipzig. Therefore, we have entitled this document "From before Leipzig to Chiang Mai".

As we journey towards the 27th General Council in Chiang Mai, the theme "Persevere in your witness" is a good opportunity to take a look back at our lives as a communion and see ways in which we have engaged in witness in this inter General Council era as well as before the last General Council. Through this document, we bring our history into the present tense in order to receive inspiration to persevere in that witness.

The accounts given here are all signs that the WCRC and its antecedents have had a long history of perseverance in our witness. On the basis of the Word of God, we have heeded the call to be prophetic, and to be a counterforce to death and destruction whether it be in the 19th century or in any of the decades of the 20th Century. We continue to engage in that prophetic witness in this 21st Century.

Each era comes with its challenges for our witness. The Powers that stand against our witness are strong. Sometimes there is the temptation to be discouraged. No matter how committed we are to our witnessing, the challenges simply seem to be compounding, and things are becoming worse. The obvious question that emerges is, "Is it worth it?" "Isn't this a losing battle?" It is within all these that we hear the Word of God as for example in Hebrews 12: 1 and 2

> "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entan-

> gles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Now, more than ever before, we are called upon to persevere in our faith and witness. We can do no other. It is my hope that the 27th General Council will inspire the WCRC and all its member churches to persevere in our faith and witness, and show our perseverance through our actions.

I take this opportunity to give thanks to God for the leadership of our President, Rev. Najla Kassab who has led us so effectively through this journey from Leipzig to Chiang Mai. We are grateful to the Vice Presidents, the General Treasurer, and all the Executive Committee members for the gifts they placed at the disposal of the communion for this inter-council period. We offer thanks to the leadership of our regional councils and the roles they have played in making the Communion relevant within their regions. We give thanks to Rev Chris Ferguson for his leadership as General Secretary in the first half of the journey from Leipzig to Chiang Mai.

I am thankful to my colleagues, the Executive Secretaries, who put together this documenting of our journey between the 26th and 27th General Council. So, to Philip Vinod Peacock, Hanns Lessing and |Muna Nassar, I say a huge "Thank you".

I hope reading this account inspires us to persevere in our witness as we gather in Chiang Mai, and as we discern God's will together in future for how we persevere in witness beyond this 150th year.

Setri Nyomi
Interim General Secretary
September 2025

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Before Leipzig (1875 to 2017)

The making of the WCRC from the beginnings

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has a history dating back to the second half of the 19th Century. From the 1860's Presbyterian church leaders and scholars in Scotland, England and United States of America had been in conversation and correspondence about the importance of having a closer link in relationships. They began drawing church leaders like-minded churches in other parts of Europe into this conversation. Thus, in July 1875, a group of Reformed Christians gathered in London to begin that journey of togetherness. This marked the birth of what is today called the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). This began the journey of the body that James McCord described a century later, in 1975, as "the oldest organized world family of Protestant Churches." At that meeting, they adopted the name "The Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System."

Six years later, in the same city of London, in July 1891, leaders of Congregational churches in the USA and the United Kingdom gathered to give expression to a similar desire to engage in mutual support and togetherness in mission, thus bringing to birth the International Congregational Council.

In 1946, The Reformed Ecumenical Synod was formed gathering some Reformed churches with an original intention of going beyond an association of churches into an organic union as a synod. The first Assembly was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. This body became the Reformed Ecumenical Council in 1988.

Churches in these three streams trace their roots through the 16th Century Reformation, especially in the movement led by Ulrich Zwingli, Heindrich Bullinger, John Calvin, Marie Dentiere, and John Knox – commonly labelled as Reformed. The Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian Sys-

tem was joined very early in its history by churches that are outcomes of reforming movements that predates the 16th Century Reformation inspired by Pierre Valdes and Jan Hus which were movements initiated in the 12th and 15th Centuries, but which aligned themselves with the Reformed. It is with this background that the Waldensian Churches and the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren became a part of the Communion of Reformed Churches from an early stage of its history.

In 1970, the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System united with the International Congregational Council to become the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational). The Uniting General Council took place in Nairobi, Kenya.

In June 2010, another Uniting General Council (UGC) took place – this time uniting the World Alliance of Reformed Churches with the Reformed Ecumenical Council. The venue for this UGC was Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. It is here that the life of this continuing body began under the new identity of World Communion of Reformed Churches.

Today the communion has over 200 member churches covering more than 100 million Christians. Most member churches are in the Global South and many are called to witness as religious minorities in their countries.

The WCRC member churches are Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, Waldensian, Husite, and United/Uniting Churches. These member churches are aligned to Reformed theology and ethos, and cherish our commitment to the ecumenical movement and doing our part to live out the prayer of the Lord Jesus for His followers to be one as expressed in John 17. Our togetherness as Reformed churches have always cherished a key objective to play a coherent role within the ecumenical movement.

Our togetherness was also meant to strengthen our voice in society. In speaking together as a united voice, it was felt we could be better witness in the world engaging in God's mission in unity.

Important commitments of the WCRC through its history

In the entire life of the communion, from 1875 to date, three of the many important commitments are:

1. Bringing Reformed Christians and United churches with Reformed components together for the sake of common witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. This from 1875 was understood to include spreading the Gospel and being agents of societal transformation. Therefore, the history of the communion is punctuated with strong stances against colonialism, Nazism, racism and apartheid, gender injustice, economic injustice, climate injustice, etc. Our strong commitment to justice is rooted in our understanding of God mission as including a call to be God's agents of transformation especially in a world that is broken and characterized by evil and injustice.
2. Strengthening smaller and "weaker" Reformed churches wherever they are found, and when they are going through challenges.
3. Making every effort to contribute to Christian unity. In his book "A Century of Service" the fifth General Secretary of this family of churches (Marcel Pradervand) linked this commitment to Calvin's vision expressed in a 1552 letter to Thomas Cranmer in which he expressed readiness to cross ten seas for the sake of Christian unity. In the foreword of the same book, James McCord pointed out that this communion was very instrumental in the formation of the World Council of Churches. In the WCRC understanding, to be Reformed is to be ecumenical. The events of uniting that took place in 1970 and 2010 are therefore both expressions of living out what the organization is called to be. It is also clear that throughout our history, it is this body that positively expresses very clearly the appreciation of the presence of uniting and united churches in its membership.

Select Historical Milestones

1875

London Conference establishing the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian System. In the early part of the 20th Century, it became known for short as the World Presbyterian Alliance.

1877

First General Council in Edinburgh, Scotland

1880s
Challenged colonialism policies of European countries as they affect countries like New Hebrides and Congo.

1888
General Council decided to establish the office for a full-time general secretary. This was first based in London and in 1913 the office moved to Edinburgh, Scotland.

1890
Sent a delegation to the Anti-Slavery conference in Brussels.

1891
The International Congregational Council was formed in London, UK. The first Council was in July 1891.

1892
The International Union of Women's Foreign Missionary Societies had their first one-day meeting in the context of the 5th General Council in Toronto. They continued this one-day meeting during the next eight General Councils.

1910
Participated in the Edinburgh Missionary Conference.

1920s–1940s
The Alliance maintained a strong stance against Nazism, standing with the Confessing Church in Germany. The Alliance also facilitated international reception of the Barmen Declaration of 1934.

1946
The Reformed Ecumenical Synod was formed with its first Assembly in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA.

1948
The General Council voted to move its office immediately to Geneva and to scale down the profile of the General Secretary to executive secretary. This downgrade was to leave the possibility of integrating into the structure of the World Council of Churches. The vision was to be closer to and more supportive of the WCC, which was about to hold its first Assembly. The Alliance returned to using the term Gener-

al Secretary as the designation for its Chief Executive Officer only in 1954 in order for it to play its ecumenical role more effectively.

1948

The International Congregational Council elected its first full time "minister and secretary" (equivalent to the Alliance's general secretary). Prior to this it was a voluntary position held by a person who also functioned as a pastor in a parish or an officer in one of the member churches.

1949

The first World Conference of Reformed and Presbyterian Youth was held.

1950s

The Alliance increased its discussions and actions on racism and especially strengthened its movement against apartheid.

1954

In the Alliance's 17th General Council in Princeton, New Jersey, USA, there was a clear decision to work towards gender inclusivity of delegates. Before then most women participants came as spouses of delegates and had their own parallel programmes.

1960s

Begun a long history of decades of bilateral theological dialogues with a number of Christian World Communions - Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Mennonites, Anglicans, Classical Pentecostals, Organization of African Instituted Churches, Seventh Day Adventists. Some of these, for example with Lutherans, have led to the conclusion that there are no dividing factors and therefore we come to a place of growing closer together. Others like the one with the Mennonites have led us to a place of repentance from past wrongs and perpetrated by the Reformed, and taking a journey of healing the past together.

1970

The International Congregational Council and the Alliance of Reformed Churches throughout the World holding the Presbyterian Order united to become the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational).

1982

The Alliance's 21st General Council declared *status confessionis* on Apartheid – declaring apartheid sinful and its theological justification heresy. Two member churches were suspended.

1986

The Belhar Confession was developed in South Africa. The Alliance both supported it and became its platform for international reception and solidarity.

1988

The Reformed Ecumenical Synod became the Reformed Ecumenical Council. The Reformed Ecumenical Council brought to an end an almost decade-long debate on what to do about its member churches that ordained homesexuals. It concluded that while there may be fundamental disagreements among member churches on this issue, there was no theological justification to make this a basis of breaking relationships or of excluding any church from membership.

1989

The Alliance instituted a Programme to Act Challenge and Transform (PACT) in order to stimulate churches' actions on gender justice.

1995 to 1997

Building on our commitment to the justice, peace and integrity of Creation, WCRC heard a clear call from our Southern African Churches in a consultation in Kitwe Zambia in 1995 to take seriously the death dealing nature of global economic currents. This was echoed by the Latin American churches in Costa Rica in 1996. This led to the *processus confessionis* declared on how we address the unjust economic systems that govern the world.

2002–2005

Questions on whether or not the term "Alliance" was appropriate for the organization, leading to a vigorous discussion on taking seriously our identity as a communion.

2004

The Accra Confession was adopted by the Alliance's 24th General Council. The churches declared their understanding of God's calling in the contemporary world vis-à-vis economic injustice and climate injustice in this faith statement. The Accra

Confession has since then been received within and outside the Reformed family as a gift that strengthens our witness and has sparked many debates.

2010

The Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches united to form the current World Communion of Reformed Churches. The Uniting General Council was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA.

2012

In a consultation called by the WCRC in San Paulo inviting the World Council of Churches, the Council for World Mission and other partners to deepen the Accra Confession's impact. A major outcome of the Sao Paulo consultation is the initiative towards the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA). The NIFEA movement now has the CWM, WCC, LWF and the Methodists in joint action towards addressing the injustice in the global financial and economic architecture.

2014

The Communion moved its global headquarters from Geneva, Switzerland, to Hannover, Germany in January 2014. Hannover became the fourth operational centre of the World Communion of Reformed Churches following London, England (1888-1913), Edinburgh, Scotland (1913-1948) and Geneva, Switzerland (1948-2013)

2017

The 26th General Council was held in Leipzig, Germany. Marking the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, the WCRC formally affiliated with the Joint Declaration on the Declaration of Justification and issued the Wittenberg Witness. The Council also adopted a Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination.

These are just some milestones in the years before our last General Council held in Leipzig, Germany. As we give account of our stewardship between the 26th General Council and the 27th General Council, we give thanks God for the journey since our beginnings in 1875. We give thanks to God for these 150 years.

Some reflections on the last 150 years

As we face the twenty-first Century and read the signs of our times, we reflect on the journey for the last 150 years and ask some questions. How prepared are we to persevere in our witness in spite of the challenges of our times?

1. 150 years after the commitment to be together and strengthen one another especially churches in minority and weak situations, we still have those situations with us. Churches in some of our regions with long histories of Christian witness are facing very serious crises – dwindling numbers, financial challenges, etc. etc. How do we continue in this witness in such settings of numerical decline? We look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.
2. 140 years after the Berlin Conference and the prophetic reaction of the Communion in constantly challenging colonialism, we still have the legacies of colonialism and new forms of colonialism with us. Are we going to continue our prophetic witness as we look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith?
3. 91 years after the Barmen declaration, and we still have death-dealing misleading theologies with us which often support genocidal tendencies. How do we continue to be the confessing church in these tendencies? We do so looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.
4. 40 years after the Belhar Confession – racism is alive and well today. Today the issues of migration and new forms of government sanctioned discrimination are alive and well in some context. In what ways are we looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith in these matters?
5. 20 years after the Accra Confession – the economic arrangements of the world continue to deal death to large sections of global population even in the global North while Oligarchs have taken control in East and West. How do we renew our commitment to justice as we look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith?

From Leipzig to Chiang Mai

The Strategic Planning Process

Programmatic Decisions by the 26th General Council

The 26th General Council discerned the programmatic objectives of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and took the following actions:[1]

Theology

ACTION 20 "Taking up the "Unfinished Agenda" of the Reformation"

At the occasion of the commemoration of the Reformation, the General Council of the WCRC resolves to recommit itself to the following objectives that shall shape its life and witness, its programmes on theology, mission, justice and communion and its strategic plan:

a) to the principle of the Reformed church always reforming according to the Word of God;
b) to the continuing relevance of the Barmen Declaration and the confessions of Belhar and Accra;
c) to the principle contained in both the Belhar and the Accra Confessions that God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused;
d) to the inseparable link between evangelization and justice;
e) to the priesthood of all believers;

[1] See: [https://wcrc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GC2017-Minutes-EN.pdf]. More programmatic actions were taken in the Public Witness Process (see Actions 51-70 in the Proceedings of the 26th General Council).

f) to peace, reconciliation, care, and the ecumenical unity of the Christian Church;
g) to the *sola scriptura* principle as the basis for Christian communion; and
h) to interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

ACTION 21 "Operating Principles"

The General Council of the WCRC affirms that the following operating principles shall guide its theological work:

a) the commitment to give voice to the faith experiences of people from all continents;
b) the commitment to contextuality; to the diversity of voices; to the multiplicity of languages; and to, though not limited to, the voices of young people and women;
c) the commitment to do theology, beginning with the experiences of the poor and oppressed, and aiming at their liberation;
d) the commitment to the inseparable link between communion and justice; and
e) the commitment to robust engagement with the Word of God.

ACTION 22 "Ecumenical Dialogues"

The General Council of the WCRC resolves:

a) to express appreciation for the manifold insights that have developed from the bilateral ecumenical dialogues with the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal Churches that have taken place since the Uniting General Council in Grand Rapids;
b) to commit to continue engagement with ecumenical partners and be open to new partners; and
c) to confirm the following principles that should guide the dialogues:
    1) relevance for the WCRC and its member churches' mission of unity and justice;
    2) global perspective rooted in contextual realities; and
    3) the application of methodologies and content of the dialogues in discussions within the Communion.

Justice

ACTION 23

The General Council resolves that the primary areas that will drive the justice work of the WCRC will be economic justice, ecological justice, gender justice and inclusive communities.

ACTION 24

The General Council resolves that the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative will be one of the priorities for the WCRC, in collabo- ration with our ecumenical partners. The WCRC will broaden the scope and breadth of NIFEA to include macro-economic and ecological questions and work towards imagining alternatives to the current dominant economic system.

ACTION 32

The Communion's Attention to Gender Justice

The General Council:

a) confesses that gender-based violence and discrimination in all its forms are sin; and
b) asks that the WCRC join with its ecumenical partners in approaching the UN Commission on the Status of Women, urging a renewed dialogue and response to all forms of gender-based violence.

ACTION 33

The General Council instructs the WCRC Executive Committee to open a space of discernment and offer accompaniment, educational materials and guidance to member churches that do not presently ordain women. They shall develop principles and an action plan by which the pledge of "A Declaration of Faith on Women's Ordination" will be realized prior to the next General Council in 2024.

ACTION 38

The General Council resolves, having seen a worsening of systems and structures of oppression that threaten life for human beings and the whole creation, to engage in a process of discerning how to address the current challenges

attending the rise of authoritarian and populist ideologies and movements in our time.

ACTION 39

To reflect the Communion's commitment to gender equality, the General Council resolves:

a) that at least 50% of the WCRC Executive Committee members elected at the General Council will be female; and
b) that, in the hiring process of senior staff, gender equity will be pursued vigorously with a clear goal of at least 50% female.

Strengthening Communion

ACTION 40

The General Council requests the Executive Committee to initiate a process that can lead to a possible constitutional change so that at least one delegate under 30 will be appointed as an officer of the Executive Committee at future General Councils.

ACTION 41

The General Council resolves that the WCRC promotes the principle of the inseparability of communion and justice in all its structures and programmatic work for the next seven years.

ACTION 42

The General Council resolves that the WCRC invites member churches into a conversation about the interpretation of Scripture that is grounded in the Reformed tradition that affirms life for all, and provides resources as necessary.

ACTION 43

The General Council resolves that the WCRC should embark on a process of engaging member churches in a critical analysis of leadership consistent with the communion we seek, modelling inclusive forms of leadership based on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ including his resistance to domination and control.

ACTION 44

The General Council resolves to:

a) reaffirm the pivotal role the regions play in strengthening communion between the churches by providing spaces for dialogue and action;
b) reaffirm the participation of regional representatives in the decision-making structures of the WCRC and in programmatic work to enhance the participation of the churches from all regions; and
c) affirm working styles that strengthen the synergy between the local, regional and global levels.

ACTION 48

The General Council:

a) resolves to commit to equal access to ordination for all members; and
b) asks the Executive Committee to develop a process by which we, as a Communion, wrestle with the question of what it means for all members to fulfil their baptismal vows when they sense the call to ordained service.

ACTION 50

The General Council commits to:

a) set the atmosphere for dialogue and discernment on communion and diversity—in a spirit of consensus building where there are no winners and losers, where no one is excluded, where all are protected and where mutual challenge, mutual accountability and grace become key values;
b) facilitate means in which to engage each other, embrace our diversity, accompany people and draw on the theological resources of Scripture and our Reformed tradition; and
c) accompany member churches and regional councils to organize consultations and discussion groups, with Bible Study and reflection, to address issues around communion and sexual diversity.

ACTION 55

The General Council:

a) condemns all acts of violence against LGBTQ persons, regardless of our theological views, around the globe;
b) confesses its complicity in supporting violence through its silence; and
c) continues to commit itself to working for justice, freedom and a safe world for all persons to flourish.

The Work of the Strategic Planning Committee

The Officers Committee installed the Strategic Planning Committee to prepare the 2018-2024 Strategic Plan.

The following persons were invited to serve on the Strategic Planning Committee:

Rathnakara Sadananda (Moderator), Necta Montes, Phiri Isabel, Collin Cowan, Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth, Najla Kassab (President), Sylvana Apituley, Samuel Nyampong, Raíssa Brasil, Lisa Vander Wal, Anna Case-Winters, Johann Weusmann, Chris Ferguson (General Secretary).

The Strategic Plan was presented and adopted by the Executive Committee at its 2018 meeting in Seoul, Korea.

Discerning the Big Picture[2]

The introduction of the 2018-2024 Strategic Plan affirms the Vision Statement of the 26th General Council[3] and commits to Articles II (Basis), III (Values), IV (Identity, Mission and Purposes) of the WCRC's Constitution. On this foundation, the Strategic Plan offers a Vision and defines an overarching goal for the work of the Communion:

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2 See: [https://wcrc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/WCRC-StrategicPlan-Introduction.pdf].
3 Proceedings of the 26th General Council, 147-149.

Vision Statement

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is called to communion and is committed to justice.

Through robust engagement with the Word of God and the call of the Holy Spirit, the World Communion of Reformed Churches is always being transformed as it strives for the full and just participation of all. In our diversity, we seek to be a living expression of "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

We work to renew and restore the economy and the earth, so that all humanity and the whole of creation might live life in its fullness (Deuteronomy 30:19; John 10:10).

Overarching Goal

By 2024, the World Communion of Reformed Churches will strive to be significantly strengthened and increasingly effective in living out God's call to communion and commitment to justice. As a global *Koinonia*, we are marked by discerning, confessing, witnessing and being reformed together.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches, with all the partners God provides, serves its member churches and also works for the transformation of the whole world, which is so loved by God but still trapped by multiple injustices and death, having fallen among thieves (John 10:10).

Five Interlocking Dimensions

As it strives to fulfil its vision, the World Communion of Reformed Churches works through two **strategic trajectories**:

- Strengthening and deepening the *Koinonia*.
- Growing and expanding its work for a greater global impact.

These strategic trajectories are applied through **five interlocking dimensions:**

- Communion
- Justice
- Theology
- Mission
- Ecumenical Engagement and Interreligious Cooperation

Communion

The work on communion will be lived out through acts of justice that refute the logic of exclusion that marks social and political institutions, the economic order and sometimes even the church itself (General Council Actions 20, 21, 41).

The communion that the WCRC seeks to become will embody the radical hospitality of the gospel of Jesus, which demonstrates respect, trust, love and willingness to listen to a variety of voices seeking fullness of life.

In the commitment to discerning God's will together, the Communion therefore embraces the challenges of linguistic and cultural divergences, as well as differences in theological and hermeneutical perspectives as positive building blocks that set the atmosphere for dialogue, discernment and engagement on communion with justice.

Justice

The WCRC seeks to do justice in the context of a world groaning in travail (Romans 8:19-24) and fallen among thieves (John 10:10), yet we continue to affirm that we are gripped with the power of the resurrection, gifted by the God of life.

The WCRC will seek to engage the whole Communion to discern the signs of the times in order to effectively witness to transformative reformation in the areas of economic, social, gender and ecological justice so that member

churches will be able to faithfully confess to the God of life in a world fallen among thieves (John 10:10).

The WCRC will seek to deepen and strengthen its existing commitments to justice while at the same time expanding and growing in accordance with the vision of the General Council 2017.

Theology

Hearing the cries of wounded communities and engaging with them (General Council Action 21), the theological work of the WCRC shall lead the whole Communion in theologically-rooted processes of confessing the faith, drawing on the Reformed tradition and contextual theologies to address the present reality.

Mission

In witnessing its call to communion and its commitment to justice, the WCRC will articulate afresh a vision of liberating discipleship that rejoices in God's renewing presence in individual conversion and in social transformation and embraces the call to live out God's mission in the face of idolatries of power and privilege.

The WCRC does not yet have an agreed consensus on foundations and goals of its missional witness. Faith convictions that discern the *missio dei* in processes of social transformation and those that see God's presence in acts of individual conversion coexist side by side. While both positions will usually accept the validity of the respective other there is no agreement about a comprehensive understanding of mission.

Ecumenical Engagement and Inter-religious Cooperation

The WCRC understands itself as an integral part of the ecumenical movement. Taking up the constitutional mandate to "contribute to the ecumenical movement and the transformation of the world" (Art. IV. C.)

the WCRC will promote economic and ecological justice, global peace and reconciliation and provide Reformed perspectives on church unity.

The ecumenical engagement of the WCRC with other Christian communions aims to promote the visible unity of the larger church in its common witness to the world. In dialogues and other programmes, the WCRC will emphasize the interconnectedness of theology, communion, mission and justice and will foreground voices and perspectives of Christians in the Global South.

The inter-religious work of the WCRC strives for inter-religious cooperation based on trust, respect and the commitment to life, engages with the question of Christian witness in a multi-religious world and accompanies churches in conflict situations (General Council Actions 20 and 63).

Organizational Objectives

Capacity

The Strategic Plan recognizes that the many areas in which the WCRC is active overstretches the available staff capacity. The plan also observes that the staff at the time was not gender balanced and calls for a redressal of this situation. It defines the following organizational objectives that should be pursued:

1) Expand Staff through Partnerships: The WCRC will pursue partnerships to expand staff capacities through seconded staff, co-opted staff and/or mission partners/missionaries.
2) Hire Two Female Executives: Two new female executive staff members, along with sufficient administrative support, will be added, either through secondment or with guaranteed financial support to cover the duration of their contracts.
3) In the time before the new executives could be hired, two female executive advisors will be added to create the Extended Executive Staff Team, which also comprises the general secretary and executive secretaries. The advisors will be compensated for their time and have all expenses covered.

4) Develop Internship Programme: The internship programme will be further developed to increase the number of interns serving. While it is primarily a leadership development programme it does have a positive impact on capacity.

Alliances

Given the pressures apparent in the ecumenical world, it is important for the WCRC to enter into conversations with other ecumenical bodies seeking common and/or mutually supportive models of ecumenical sustainability. The WCRC must continue to deepen alliances with current partners and seek new alliances. While the focus is likely not on organic unity, it should be on coming together to demonstrate Christian unity and prophetic witness on particular issues.

The *Council for World Mission* (CWM) is an important strategic partner for the WCRC. The two organizations have had a long history of alliance and partnership. This has been marked by regular cooperation and meetings between staff, through summits of leadership and through an agreement that sees CWM and the WCRC partnering on common mission goals. These two organizations share many of the same member churches, and much of their work is in alignment. Some have even expressed a hope that the two would one day become a single organization.

The WCRC commits with CWM to a common mission partnership to journey together on issues of justice and prophetic witness, including resource sharing, joint staff planning and programming and common visioning and strategizing.

Implementation And Monitoring

The Strategic Plan also introduced an implementation and monitoring system:

- Reference Groups will be formed along the interlocking dimensions, combinations thereof and/or other strategic needs (e.g. communication). They will be approved by the officers, as will the membership

in each. Members of each Reference Group will bring their expertise while also reflecting the WCRC's diversity.

- The Reference Groups will coordinate the implementation of the objectives within their portfolios, including monitoring, evaluating and reporting to the Executive Committee through the WCRC staff. They will meet virtually unless capacity and funding can be found through programme budgets. Reference Groups will collaborate on those objectives which cut across the dimensions.
- Each Reference Group will have a moderator and a scribe. The moderators will make up the *Strategic Plan Programme Group*, which will meet virtually to coordinate the WCRC's programme work. [...]
- The General Secretary will prepare a Strategic Plan Implementation Plan, with budget, by no later than the date of the 2019 Executive Committee meeting.
- The Executive Committee will conduct a mid-term evaluation of the Communion's progress towards implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Communion and Theology Reference Group

Vuyani Vellem, HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Dawn Gikandi, Peggy Mulambya Kabonde, Rathnakara Sadananda, Isabella Novsima Sinulingga, Matthias Zeindler, Coutinho Maravilhoso Moma, Gerardo Oberman, Yvette Noble-Bloomfield.

Mission and Ecumenical Engagement Reference Group:

Anna Case-Winters, Roderick Hewitt, Joas Adiprasetya, Michael Weinrich, Lalitha Jayachitra, Peter Cruchley, Nadia Marais, Hannah North, Carola Tron, Bettina Lichtler

Justice and Witness Reference Group:

Puleng Lenka-Bula, Hilary Hagar, Patricia Sheerattan Bisnauth, Luciano Kovacs, Padi Rex, Humberto Shikiya, Celine Hoirore, Gordon Cowans, Karen Georgia Thompson, Leslie Ore, Susanne Schneeberger, Agnes Kruzsely

During the implementation of the monitoring system, it was detected that it was impossible for the two executive secretaries, responsible for the facilitation of programmes, to staff the reference groups. The system was, therefore, simplified, and as of 2021, the Reference Groups were discontinued, and the Strategic Plan

Programme Group took on the role of a programme reference group. In this role, it received the programme accountability reports, approved the programme plans, and reported to the Executive Committee.
Strategic Plan Programme Group (SPPG):

Anna Case Winters, Athena Peralta (since 2021), Chris Ferguson (General Secretary), Hilary Hagar (till 2021), HyeRan Kim-Cragg, Karen Georgia Thompson (since 2021), Najla Kassab (President), Puleng Lenka-Bula (till 2020), Rathnakara Sadananda, Roderick Hewitt, Vuyani Vellem (till 2020).

Four Verbs and Five Actions

The Strategic Plan offers a working language that articulates the WCRC's vision and mission and the objectives of its programmes. However, the document is not easily accessible.

In 2020, the SPPG, therefore, produced a summary document that defines the **Call and Commitment** of the World Communion of Reformed Churches:

> "We believe that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused (Psalms 146:7-9). God calls for just relationships with all creation" (Accra Confession).
>
> Called to communion and committed to justice, the WCRC believes that communion and justice are inextricably connected: communion without justice masks inequality, exclusion, and oppression; justice without communion is in danger of becoming divisive. Together the whole of the Communion works to renew and restore the economy and the earth, so that all humanity and the whole of creation might live life in its fullness (Deuteronomy 30:19).
>
> As the Accra Confession states, "We believe that God has made a covenant with all of creation (Genesis 9:8-12). God has brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the marketplace (Isaiah 55:1). It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential

> partners and calls us to put justice for the 'least of these' (Matthew 25:40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hosea 2:18ff).
>
> God's gift of unity is also an obligation that the WCRC pursues earnestly, inspired by the Belhar Confession. The WCRC struggles diligently to be a koinonia always reforming according to God's Word so that it will no longer replicate, reproduce, act out, or justify discrimination, patriarchy, sexism, racialized injustice, or classism, casteism, or heteronormativity."

Four verbs

Four verbs express the WCRC's mission: discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed together:

> "As a global koinonia marked by *discerning*, *confessing*, *witnessing*, and *being reformed together*, the WCRC strengthens and deepens unity among its members and coordinates common initiatives to increase its impact around the world.
>
> The WCRC *discerns* both the signs of the times and God's call to action, guided equally by its commitment to justice and to maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
>
> The WCRC is a *confessing* body, driven by the unfinished agenda of the Reformation and inspired by the Confessing Church in Germany, the community of the Belhar Confession, and the Accra Confession.
>
> The WCRC *witnesses* to the good new of Jesus Christ that transforms death-dealing systems and structures and liberates for the fullness of life. In *being reformed*, the WCRC collaborates and engages in God's work of reforming and transforming according to the Word of God and movement of the Holy Spirit."

Five Actions

In its programmatic work, the WCRC pursues **five actions**:

> The whole creation is the theatre of God's glory and glorifies God by reflecting the divine intent for the flourishing of all. This tenet of John Calvin leads the WCRC to bring the resources of the Reformed theological and confessing tradition into the present tense through listening to and addressing the suffering and cries of humanity and all of creation.
>
> The WCRC takes up the prophetic traditions of public witness confessing the God of life in a world fallen among thieves (John 10:10) and works through the following areas:
>
> Cultivating a Just Communion
>
> This koinonia comes into being as a communion by the openness that allows the Holy Spirit to transform the individual, the community of believers, and the world as a whole. This communion emerges from the contributions of all people of faith and therefore seeks to include persons and perspectives from the Communion's rich diversity in every aspect of work together.
>
> Covenanting for Justice
>
> The Accra Confession named "empire" as that overarching system under which we live and which as a church are called to resist. This means that the WCRC is focused on economic, ecological, and gender justice, along with forming communities of full and just participation that are resilient against and are able to resist violence, racism, nationalism, authoritarianism, and militarism.
>
> Doing Theology for Transformation
>
> Engaging with the unfinished agenda of the Reformation, the WCRC does theology contextually, beginning with discerning processes in which we see the world through the eyes of the powerless and suffering. In their cries we hear the pain of the crucified God. This engagement leads to confessing the faith in language that addresses the present reality.

Engaging God's Mission in a Context of Crisis

God's mission transforms the church into a missional communion that commits itself to God's work of renewal and transformation in collaboration with all people of good will, especially endeavouring to do mission from the margins in contexts of crisis and struggle.

Working with All the Partners God Provides

The WCRC believes "to be Reformed is to be ecumenical." Reformed theology sees that God is at work also in other Christian traditions and understands that the unity of the church to while the Apostolic Creed testifies is already there. God gives unity as a gift and invites the church to receive this by reforming itself and its relationships to Christians of other traditions.

The Work of the Strategic Programme Planning Group

2021 Interim Evaluation

In 2021, at the end of the COVID-19 Pandemic and in preparation for a period of reduced staff capacity because the position of the General Secretary would be vacant, the SPPG evaluated the programmatic work of the SPPG and gave an interim assessment, which might be relevant for future planning purposes:

1. The Reference Groups see the challenges to implement the Strategic Plan with the current staff capacities and are concerned that a reduction of capacity for a possible interim period might lead to a situation where the WCRC will not be able to fulfil major objectives of the Strategic Plan.
2. The Strategic Plan defines the mandate of the Reference Groups to "coordinate the implementation of the objectives within their portfolios." The Reference Groups, therefore, understand themselves as guardians of the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan. They stress that it is their responsibility to ensure that the responsibilities the WCRC has committed to by adopting the Strategic Plan shall be fulfilled. It should not be their task to take responsibility for the abandonment or weakening of these commitments.
3. The primary answer to the diminished staff capacity should, wherever possible, not be to downgrade goals, but to develop a programme model that will allow the implementation of the objectives of the Strategic Plan.
4. Such a programme model shall allow executive secretaries to call upon WCRC regions, member churches, and working groups to implement global programmes on behalf of the WCRC. The Hannover secretariat shall support the programme activities administratively. The role of the executive secretaries shall focus on the coordination of these activities and not so much on their facilitation. It shall be the primary function of the executive secretaries to develop the programme work according to the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan and to ensure coherence of the different programme areas with the vision and the mission of the WCRC.

5. The Reference Groups emphasize the importance of the peace and reconciliation work and strongly support the establishment of the Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement (GRAPE). The GRAPE programme shall secure core responsibilities of the WCRC with third-party funds. The GRAPE platforms are designed to allow the WCRC to maintain a priority objective of the Strategic Plan without adding to the workload responsibility to the existing staff.
6. The ecumenical leadership of the WCRC is critical for the furthering of our common call to unity. We perceive that this is not a time to pull back our energies from this work. We commend shared discernment to determine the best ways to go forward. This may include heavier reliance on Reference Groups and Working Groups for implementation of objectives in this area. Reference Groups expressed willingness to expend greater energy in this area as needed. Executive secretaries would focus upon coordination, coherence, and communication in the ecumenical endeavours currently before us. The capacity for online gatherings for this work has the advantage of not expending scarce funds for travel to meetings.
7. The "COVID and Beyond" project is an example how different programme objectives can be integrated into one activity. This approach has several advantages: It uses the capacity in the Hannover secretariat more effectively and it brings the different programme networks into the conversation of the whole communion. This allows mutual engagement and cross-fertilization in processes of joint discernment. The strategy of the integration of programmes should be continued on a smaller scale after the end of the current "COVID and Beyond" process.
8. The Reference Groups noted the effectiveness of our online work together. There are, in fact, advantages of wider accessibility, the possibility of more frequent meetings, and the capacity to record and make widely available the presentations and proceedings of the project.
9. The Reference Groups expressed deep appreciation for the executive staff in their wise and effective leadership in these uncertain times and a willingness to assist in the ways that seem best.

2023 Evaluation

Assessment of the 2017-2024 Strategic Plan

The Secretariat presented a quantitative analysis of programmes held from 2017-2024. At the end of the strategic plan in 2024, of the 60 programmes defined in the strategic plan, 54 will either be completed in 2024 or be still ongoing because of their continuous character.

Programmes have been conducted in all regions of the WCRC, in many instances with active participation of the WCRC regional bodies and member churches.

AIPRAL	CANAAC	ACRC	Europe	Middle East	South Asia	South East Asia	NEAAC	Indonesia	Pacific
4	7	9	16	4	2	6	8	5	2

The reports included both quantitative and qualitative assessment. The SPPG did assessment work looking at the programmes through the lenses of: discerning, confessing, witnessing and being reformed. We also asked the question: what worked well, what did not, and how can we improve?

The SPPG expressed its appreciation of the WCRC programme work since the Leipzig General Council. Despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the reduced staff capacity since 2021. The many programmes planned went forward and almost all the programs have been accomplished in one way or another. The qualitative assessment of programmes affirmed the high quality of WCRC programmes and the widespread appreciation by member churches and partners.

Accountability Reports

A substantial accountability report of programmes implemented in 2022 was received. The response of the SPPG in general was to marvel how much has been accomplished during this programme year. This was in spite of the diminished staff capacity that resulted from the Executive Secretaries needing to take on the work of the General Secretary in addition to their own–already full time–jobs. Much appreciation was expressed to the staff for their effective leadership in this interim time.

Partnering to Expand Staffing Capacity

Also remarkable has been the creative work done with partners to increase staff capacity:

- With the support of the PCUSA, Bread for the World and the EMW, the WCRC set up the position of an Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy with a five-year appointment of Muna Nassar from Palestine.
- With the support of the Council for World Mission, WCRC is in the process of appointing a Programme Coordinator for Gender Justice with a five-year appointment for Minwoo Oh, who is a minister of the PCK.
- The Church of Scotland is funding a 50% position of a mission partner who will work as a liaison officer in the Reformed Ecumenical Office in Rome, which will support the ecumenical work of the WCRC, Waldensian Church and Church of Scotland.
- In preparation for the 2025 General Council, WCRC is currently negotiating financial support for two positions: a General Council Coordinator and a travel coordinator?.

SPPG Recommendation:

The SPPG celebrates the expansions in staffing these partnerships make possible. At the same time SPPG commends that care be taken to insure that there is clarity regarding these new positions with reporting within the system and oversight, especially as these positions are supported and/or coordinated with other partners.

Ongoing Assessment

It is very important that programmes have built-in evaluation tools; continuous assessment with a clear outcome-related template. It is important to begin with "why" before moving to "what." Concept notes are written whenever a new program is planned and these are effective in setting the course for them. It needs to be something that does not create another layer of administrative overhead. Drawing from the concept notes, a clear set of assessment questions can be drawn. Survey Monkey could be utilized as an analysis tool. It may be that this evaluation role should not fall to the program executives.

SPPG Recommendation:

SPPG recommends that we find a "right sized" means of ongoing evaluation that does not overburden the staff but allows for ongoing assessment.

Involving Member Churches and Regions in WCRC Programmes

We need to give attention to regions and their connection to the communion as a whole including their financial support and other forms of participation. The regions provide a particular connection to member churches and not having consistency in the regions that effectively supports the work of the WCRC is problematic. Some regions are doing better than others. How do we reach to the regions and how do we reach the member churches?

If the work of the Executive Committee is not communicated to the leadership of the member churches and their regions, the work of the WCRC will neither make an impact nor be relevant. The meaning of "communion" and its commitment is at stake. SPPG discussed how to address this issue. We must ensure that the nomination and the election of the next Executive Committee take this into serious consideration for the General Council 2025.

SPPG Recommendation:

SPPG recommends that members of the Executive Committee be invited to contact the heads of churches in their regions, reaching out to nurture relations and facilitate their participation in the work of the WCRC.

COVID-19 and Beyond[4]

Living in Apocalyptic Times

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the whole Communion. Churches had to attend to the sick and dying, apply distancing regulations, and deal with dramatically reduced income. In many countries, the pandemic completely overwhelmed already stretched health systems. Many people lost their income. The pandemic put solidarity to a test on all levels. Particularly on a global level, international solidarity failed to support vulnerable regions.

The life of the WCRC was also affected. Programmes, meetings, and activities had to be cancelled. Communion life had to be switched from face-to-face to digital. Zoom conferences offered opportunities to share and support each other. Many people expressed their appreciation for the support that they received from the Communion.

The WCRC responded to these challenges by developing a global discernment process that should help the Communion to come to terms with the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme was built upon the theological concepts that were defined during the strategic planning process. The programme was planned for a year (December 2020–November 2021) and had the title "What Does God require of us? Discerning, Confessing, and Witnessing in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond."

The concept note described the objective of the programme as follows:

> "The Covid-19 pandemic exposes the fault lines of our world in merciless clarity. Almost everywhere the vulnerable, poor and marginalized are most affected by the disease, by the measures of disease control and by the tensions that boil up in this crisis.
>
> At the same time, many people feel that the pandemic also provides a Kairos. The root causes of inequality, exploitation and oppression are being exposed. The old structures of economy and politics are not able to deal with the challenge. Everywhere, decisions of previously unimaginable magnitude are taken, and it is already getting obvious that many of them will be to the benefit of the already powerful. The segregation among na-

[4] See the documentation of the COVID19 and Beyond Process on the WCRC website: [https://wcrc.eu/require/].

> tions and within our societies increases even further. Several people call this development the hardening of a global apartheid."

In all the hardship it causes, the crisis therefore also provides an opportunity for constructive engagement based on the confession to the God of life in a world fallen among thieves.

The invitation to the Communion called upon the churches to discern the challenges posed by the pandemic under the guidance of Micah 6:8:

> "We live in apocalyptic times. The triad of the COVID-19 pandemic, racism and authoritarianism, and the climate crisis has not only placed our planet in a perilous predicament, but it also presents itself as *kairotic* moment for the church. This is both in terms of the church's own self-understanding but also its mission. In times of crises the church is called to find orientation and hope in the Word of God. The prophet Micah emphasizes that in times that might appear to us as turbulent, desperate, and confusing the direction of Scripture is clear and straightforward. We know very well what is required of us: "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8)."

The COVID-19 and Beyond Project

The whole program put strong emphasis on the spiritual and liturgical character of the life of the Communion. It combined the four verbs with the seasons of the year of the church, which structured the whole programme.

- Advent & Epiphany: Discerning Circle
- Lent & Easter: Confessing Circle
- Pentecost: Witnessing Circle
- Ordinary Time: Circle on Being Reformed

Each circle was composed according to the discernment model of the Leipzig General Council and consisted of the following elements:

- Theme Plenary (which addressed the challenges posed by the pandemic from the perspective of the particular verb)

- Two Sharing Sessions, in which WCRC regions and networks shared their experiences, their theological and liturgical reflections on the situation, their acts of witness, and new ways to be a reforming church.
- One Discernment Session, in which the participants digested the input and shared their learnings with the whole Communion.

The following regions contributed to the Sharing Sessions: African Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC). WCRC Europe, Communion of Reformed Churches in Indonesia, Middle East, Northeast Asia Area Council, Latin America Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (AIPRAL), Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC), South Asia, Pacific, Southeast Asia.

The following networks and programme groups shared with the Communion: Women, Racism—Authoritarianism–Nationalism, people living with disabilities, Israel Palestine, New International Financial Economic Architecture (NIFEA), youth, human sexuality, freedom of religion or belief, indigenous people, Global Institute of Theology.

The Discerning Circle

From the Worship: Commissioned to Do Justice

As we journey as a Church, we lament in our complicity in systems that destroy creation, as we have sinned against the earth, in greed we have over-consumed and exploited earthly resources. Droughts, rising temperatures, air-pollution, and changing weather patterns continue to threaten the most vulnerable populations, exacerbating existing inequalities that continue to rise like the sea levels.

In our lament we recognise our interconnectedness and interdependence with all creation. As we are God's creatures existing in relationship with God's creation. Let us therefore listen to the cries of anxiety, grief and trauma from the indigenous communities, as the land of the ancestors continues to be threatened. In our lament let us find the tools for change, resistance and solidarity.

> We are called to do justice, in kindness and humility and so as the sea levels rise, and the earth weeps we plead our case before the mountains, and let the hills hear our voice, as we chant together:

> We're not drowning, we're fighting
> We're not drowning, we're fighting
> We're not drowning, we're fighting

[...] Our Lord calls out the house of the wicked, where the wealthy are full of violence, dishonesty, and deceit (Micah 6:10-12). How wicked a house we find ourselves in when access to healthcare during a pandemic is privatized, where lobbyists feud over vaccines that will likely be limited in favor of the wealthy nations. The wicked scales (Micah 6:10) of inequality weigh heavily in the pockets of the rich, where the wealthiest men on earth become richer and increasingly unjust to their workforces, whilst the global poor get poorer and the city stands strong.

We must, though, confess to our own sins of ignorance, greed, and exploitation, as we have at times succumbed to the temptations of the neoliberal capitalist ideology, a system which rewards the wealthy and penalizes the poor. Yet we know that God will strike down the systems of exploitation and that the earthly empires will fall. So as a collective, we go on our journey as Church, taking the side of the oppressed, those who the house of the wicked has sought to crush.

> We are called to do justice, in kindness and humility, and so we resist the temptations of wealth, we lament against the disparities of the city, the bankers, the unjust economic infrastructures, as we know that God condemns and strikes down the violence, deceit and injustice of earthly empires, and so we chant together:
>
> Take it down
> Take it down
> Take it down

We are commissioned on this journey to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God, to become agents of transformation in the world (Micah 6:8).

To do justice, we must witness.
To love kindness, we must repent.
To walk humbly, we must be in solidarity with the oppressed.

God of the oppressed, I commend to you our sisters and brothers in Christ, whom we, this day, have commissioned to your service to journey as a collective in response to Covid-19. To go out into the world and participate in the redemption of all

creation, to call for justice for those whose grief and suffering we have witnessed, and to love faithfully as we trust in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the face of so much fear, pain, and uncertainty.

Amen.

From the Sharing

In the Sharing Session on 10 February 2021, Rev Isaac Kalonji from the Democratic Republic of Congo informed about the economic impact of COVID-19 on refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons:

"Ambassador Minata Samate is right to say that "the Covid-19 pandemic is ruining the economy, putting pressure on health systems, but above all, worsening the already gloomy humanitarian situation on the African continent."

Indeed, Central Africa was already suffering from a serious and even chronic economic anemia, and the populations live in indescribable poverty as a result of mismanagement and endless conflicts. COVID-19 has emerged as a health war or a natural disaster, thus worsening the socio-economic situation and especially that of refugees, internally displaced persons, as well as that of stateless persons.

According to the World Health Organization, as until yesterday, Saturday 06/02/2021, the statistics update looks like this:

- Cameroon 30,313 cases, 28,045 healings and 474 deaths.
- Burundi 1,698 cases, 773 recoveries and 3 deaths.
- DR Congo 22,322 cases, 14,997 healings and 665 deaths.
- Republic of Congo 7,887 cases, 5,846 recoveries and 117 deaths.
- Rwanda 16,186 cases, 11,617 healings and 213 deaths.

Given the fragility of the health system, the lack of equipment, the absence of a large number of qualified health workers, and the very limited financial means, this situation is very alarming and deserves the sustained attention of all.

To prepare our presentation, we contented ourselves with various United Nations reports as well as daily life.

In relation to refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons in Central Africa, UN News reveals that "West and Central Africa has one of the largest displaced populations in Africa with some 5.6 million internally displaced

persons, 1.3 million displaced persons, 1.4 million returnees and 1.6 million stateless persons.

These people have lost everything, their property, their land, and sometimes even their families, and thus they have no social security. They depend on local and, above all, international protection and solidarity.

The restrictive measures taken by politico-administrative and health leaders to prevent the spread of the global COVID-19 pandemic, including the closure of borders, the isolation of capitals and large cities, and confinement, have had fatal consequences on the above-mentioned groups of people.

These people need to eat, drink clean water, sleep in humanly acceptable conditions, have access to basic primary health care, and get children to school. If life has become unbearable for those who live at home, imagine what the situation must be like for those who are forced to live outside their usual surroundings. They have become more vulnerable and more isolated than before.

Due to repeated cycles of conflicts, the DRC stands out in terms of the number of internally displaced persons and ranks first among African countries. The same goes for the refugees who come from Burundi, Rwanda, and South Sudan. UNHCR spokesperson considers that the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts are intensifying in the Democratic Republic of Congo, internally displaced people face the deadly consequences of chronic underfunding. He also warns that challenges of massive funding threaten hundreds of thousands of lives in the DRC, where rising violence and COVID-19 exacerbate the already dire conditions of millions of forcibly displaced people."

From the Working Paper, Part 1

The working paper summarizes the learnings from the programme. The findings have been thoroughly discerned by the many people who participated in the programme. It expresses the understanding of the Communion. It is also an important document for the planning of the discernment model of the Chiang Mai General Council.

We share some significant aspects of the discernment:

The coronavirus ushers "in crises of fear, uncertainty, and a devastation not seen before. Over against all of it seems to be one force: the global revolution against injustice, imperialist violence, and greed, and for life, global solidarity and

human dignity. Our response, therefore, is not simply to *a* crisis, but to the whole complex of crises upon us today. A complex system of dominant and dominating power coalescing to what we dare to name as global apartheid. An exclusionary, exploitative system of death, a scandalous order of a world fallen among thieves.

The coronavirus has itself destroyed the myth that the pandemic is "the great equalizer." It has not only exposed the criminal inequalities in health care. It has exposed all the entrenched structural, institutional, and systemic economic, social and political inequalities, and the incessant, comprehensive war against the poor and vulnerable, globally and nationally. Whether we are talking about people of colour in the US, UK, and Europe, or Native Americans in the US, Canada, Bolivia, Brazil, or Chile, the racial element in all this, nationally and globally, is now undeniable. Experts say that poverty, hunger, diseases, and violence exacerbated by the pandemic, including gender-based violence, may dwarf the number of those dying of the virus itself. All this flies in the face of the calls for solidarity the World Health Organization pleads for every day. Oxfam calls it "a care crisis." The WHO calls it a 'moral and political crisis.' Thirty years ago, Jürgen Moltmann spoke of 'a God crisis.' It seems more relevant now than ever. [...]

And this advent we both prepare to journey with God as well as call on God to journey with us, to pitch God's tent among us as we journey together in a time that calls for new and deeper forms of solidarity and alliance building.

The Confessing Circle

From the Worship

Let us pray to the Lord.
We have heard the cries of injustice:
The cry of the single mother
Working at night so she can feed her children.
The cry of the old woman, who just lost her job,
The cry of the young woman
Who was promised a land of milk and honey,
And found only violence.
The cry of the woman with a mobility disability
Because our buildings are not accessible

The cry of young women in Palestine
Who hope for another future instead of annexation and annihilation
The cries of those who have been torn by war and weapons of destruction
Those who suffer the violence of colonization
Those who find themselves caught in the midst of religious conflict

Yet we have been led to believe that this is normal
Not out of the ordinary
We have been taught to not get involved
And we have obeyed
Unquestioning, believing
Having faith,
Not in God, but in the lords of this earth
Help us to question Lord
To not follow blindly
But to ask the difficult question
To expose reality
To doubt and through doubt
To come to true faith in you.

From the Sharing

In the Sharing Session on 14 April 2021, Rev. Elifas Tomix Maspaitella, Rev. Vin Labetubun, Rev. Vebiola Songupunan from the Gereja Protestan Maluku in Indonesia informed about the situation at the Molukas and called for the development of a theology of disaster:

The Protestant Church in Moluccas (Gereja Protestan Maluku/GPM) is an archipelago church in east part of Indonesia. We have 763 local congregations in the Thousand Islands in the Moluccas and the North Moluccas Province. We have been faced with disasters several times, including social, humanitarian, natural, and non-natural disasters. In 1999-2002, GPM was hit by a humanitarian disaster (Maluku rioting) which killed thousands of people, and damaged inter-religious dialogue between Christian and Muslim. In 2019, Maluku and North Maluku were rocked by earthquakes thousands of times in a period of 3 months (November 2019-January 2020). Then COVID-19 or coronavirus (22 March 2020 to date). So

peace, trauma, social and economic recovery, political interest, religious theology, local wisdom, and other themes have been a social fact and part of our reflection as a church.

But we realize that COVID-19 has dramatically changed every aspect of life. We need a strong effort to deal with these changes. Stay-at-home and social distancing orders, unemployment, and managing work from home have become the new normal, all while thousands become sick and die from the coronavirus. Coming from a strong cultural and communal root of the church, we were shocked to see empty pews at churches, but we have to adapt in this 'new normal' context. For us as a church, this covid-19 is an extraordinary event and truly unprecedented times. At the beginning of the pandemic, there were also some emerging opinions that Covid-19 is a conspiracy theory involving the Pharmacy business and politics, but we understand that each of us is vulnerable to being infected with Covid-19, but there is still hope for life or being healthy. So we need to educate our church members about this pandemic and its situation.

Since March 22, 2020, till October 11, 2020, there were 1.354 confirmed cases in Moluccas, but now (April 12, 2021), there are just 335 confirmed cases. So the infection curve is flattening, because people are well-educated about COVID-19 and their daily lives are going well too, especially in terms of their health and economic well-being.

Reflection

In the context of COVID-19 and all the disasters we faced, disaster theology has become a topic to answer all the questions about mission and church service itself. What we understand with disaster theology is how to build in the sense of disaster as a result of the environmental and social changes among pastors and congregations. Without a sense of disaster, we couldn't give an appropriate response in a disaster situation.

Second, how to build transformative Koinonia collaborations between church, government, and other social organizations to build disaster resiliency of the community, and community economic resilience by returning to nature (gardening - *dusung*), consuming local food. Through transformative Koinonia, every congregation could help each other; the government can facilitate the process of improving the economic conditions of the citizens.

Third, the Church has been called to build Disaster Management (directing church programs and finances for disasters with church regulation). In the context of GPM, the Synod Board makes a regulation that aims to reallocate the church's finances to handle the impact of COVID-19 in the whole congregation, classis/district, and synod.

Fourth, reviving the pastoral social in order to build a healing community, and post-trauma healing capacity building for pastors

Finally, we need a hermeneutic of disaster, because during the pandemic and other disasters, the concept of God, sin, Theodicy, creation and re-creation, the household of God/the sacramentum of God, and even the concept of church were questioned. What God does in disaster, whether people are infected with the coronavirus because of sin, if all humans die because of the coronavirus, how can God create humans again, etc?

From the Working Paper, Part 2

"As we enter into the second wider circle of answering the question, what does God require of us? Discerning, Confessing and Witnessing in a time of COVID19 and beyond. We must ask the question, what does it mean to confess for us? For the Reformed Communion, at this critical juncture, perhaps, the idea of confession can be fleshed out in three ways.

Firstly, we are a confessional body. The World Communion of Reformed Churches is a communion of churches that draws from the protestant traditions of the 16th century and particularly from the theology of John Calvin. The protestant reformation of the 16th century was not only a religious reformation that asserted certain theological principles, but these theological principles also emerged from and engaged with economic and political ideals.

In many ways, the protestant reformation was a reaction to the increasing commodification of society in which everything, including salvation, was reduced to a value in the Market. It is precisely in this context that grace (gratis) emerges as a theological principle to indicate that not all of life can be subsumed to a monetary value and that salvation was not for sale. It was a strong assertion that not all of life could be monetized. [...]

But to confess also means that we confess our sin, our complicity in systems of oppression. The reformed churches bear the double edge of the theological basis of

oppression as well as offering the theological resources of resistance to it. Reformed theology was the theology of the slave owners and was the basis on which opposition to slavery also emerged. Apartheid was a reformed theology, but resistance to apartheid again emerges from the reformed traditions. Our collaboration is in our silence and in the active oppression of racialized communities, the poor, the marginalized, women, and people with sexualities that question the normative. [...]

But we also need to move away from both these notions of confessional and confession towards being a confessing church, a living confession. To embrace the spirit of resistance that is to be found in the Barmen, Belhar and Accra confessions. To affirm that Jesus is Lord and that all other claims to lordship are idolatrous. That neither the Market, political system, race, or gender has the right to lord it over others because only Jesus is Lord. That we are called to reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

The Accra confession calls the faithful to understand that justice is a matter of faith; it is a matter of confession. It is the very heart of God. To put it in other words, it is not Christians who should be involved with acts of justice; rather, it is doing acts of justice that make us Christian as the Accra confession puts it 'Speaking from our Reformed tradition and having read the signs of the times, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians. We believe that our faith's integrity is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization. Therefore, we confess before God and one another.' [...]

On the cross, Jesus annuls the power of death and of the principalities who put him there. They think they have accused, judged, and found him guilty. That they now have the right to condemn him to this most horrific death the empire could conceive. But the crucifixion is the death Rome reserved for runaway slaves, rebels, and revolutionaries whose threat to the empire was so severe that this was the empire's only way to "stop" them. So even in the crucifixion they acknowledge that his is a power that threatens the mightiest power on the face of the earth. But this is the power of the powerless."

The Witnessing Circle

From the Worship

We alone can devalue gold by not caring if it
falls or rises in the marketplace. Wherever
there is gold there is a chain, you know, and
if your chain is gold so much the worse for
you. Feathers, shells and sea-shaped stones
are all as rare. This could be our revolution:
To love what is plentiful as much as what is scarce.

Our Father who art in heaven, Beloved God, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all the peoples of the earth, bring peace and righteousness to all the peoples. In your grace, may equity grow. Turn our hearts to you in healing and transformation.

Hallowed be thy name. Be present to all peoples, that we may open our eyes and recognize you in our history, in our cultures, in our struggles. Deliver us from enchantment by the false gods of money, markets and status.

Help us to praise you in our faith and actions, that, seeing our loving service in your name, others, too, may bless that name Thy kingdom come; Where people resist injustice, live in solidarity, and seek a more human social order, help us to recognize the ferment of your kingdom already at work. Bless those who are poor, those who suffer for the sake of justice, those who promote and defend human rights. Bless the children of our countries, and protect them from terror and oppression.

Thy will be done, Yes! That your wisdom would be our wisdom! Deliver us from adjusting to unjust systems, Move our hearts, and the hearts of women and men everywhere to act in love, that we may resist the

seductions of power and greed and may live in right relationships with all. on earth as it is in heaven. God, present in every movement of creation, let us be responsible stewards of your garden of life. striving for sustainability. And as the firmament in all its mystery and glory displays your cosmic will, so may our lives display the mystery and glory of love, your will for life.

Give us this day our daily bread, that no one may be threatened by hunger, malnutrition, scarcity, give bread to those who have none, and hunger for justice to those who have bread. Teach us what is enough for today, and to share with those who have less than enough, for in this, it is Jesus whom we serve. and forgive us our debts Don't let us lose our lives, as persons and as peoples, because of our debts. Let not the poorest pay for the benefit of the richest, in unfair demands, punitive interest rates and excessive charges. But forgive us, and let justice prevail. as we forgive our debtors.

As we live by your grace and sharing of your very self, deliver us from systems of aggressive and divisive individualism. Break our chains of selfishness, open our hearts to those who need our solidarity, and deliver us from illusion, that we might practise what we preach. And lead us not into temptation, deliver us from being bewitched by power, and keep us faithful to you; for you are our help, where else can we appeal?

Money will not save us, nor the market, nor our powerful friends. Strengthen us to resist the false attraction of easy answers, magic fixes, abuses of power, and the delusion that there is any way apart from justice, in which God's justice can be done, but deliver us from evil.

From every evil that objectifies the earth, all living beings, and our neighbours; from

every evil that degrades creation and
destroys societies; from every evil that
encourages us to think that we are God.

So may we learn from you to refrain from
judgment, to accord respect to all God's creation,
and so be privileged to hear the witness of those
the world treats with indignity. Because yours is
the kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen.

From the Sharing

In the Sharing Session on 21 July 2021, Norbert Stevens from the United Church in Jamaica and the Caiman Islands informed about the situation in Jamaica

Jamaica has a population of 3 million people, and up to Sunday of this week, only 5% of our population has been fully vaccinated, and you compare this because we're a church in two nations, we are in Jamaica, and in Cayman. Where in Cayman 60% of their population is fully vaccinated. 1.7% of our population have been exposed, and have contracted the virus COVID with over 1000 deaths that challenges our circumstances socially, and otherwise. Our first case was confirmed in March, 2020. Interestingly, it came through a funeral service in a church.
We have received, vaccines, through the Global Access. Vax facility. And for the most part, in fact, we've only been receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine. The first of which arrived in April of this year. The government's target is inoculating 16% of the population by the end of 2021. But as I've said to you, only 5% so far have been fully inoculated and at the current rate, it will be 2029 before we arrive at the full vaccination of population. What is critical is that we remain one of the least vaccinated populations in the English speaking Caribbean. We're behind a number of our neighbors, Barbados, St Kitts and Nevis, and St Lucia, and there are even others behind us, Haiti for instance, only received its first dose of vaccines in this month. So we are struggling as a region in relation to access to vaccines. [...]

The challenge we have which I know those of us on this platform are very much aware of is that there is a vaccination gap between the global rich, and the global

poor. COVID, you know, we brought all of us to our knees, but some have risen, quicker than others in response. For instance, inoculations go back in the United States, whereas other parts of the world. [...]

So there's some other contributing factors to the issue of equity, popular culture. In terms of music, there are a number of musicians and dancehall artists who appeal to a large group of people who are antivax vaccinators. And that's one of the songs you are hearing.

So, religion is also an issue. There are a number of people who believe that the vaccine is a mark of the beast, that it's a way in which you insert a chip into people's arms so that you can track them. But of course, social media has not helped. So, in the instance where we're having a struggle inoculating, the vast majority of our population, in order to achieve herd immunity, you're having other forces and other voices that are challenging persons not to be vaccinated.

The role of the church in the midst of this is to is to do a number of things. One is to encourage our people to be vaccinated, encourage our members to adhere to the protocols that are established in both nations, but also to be responsive to the needs of persons who are most vulnerable in our society and I included one in a story where there's one of our local churches that started a fund to ensure that persons who might have to pay for vaccinations, could actually afford it. If it came to that because obviously that's where it's going to go if persons are not able to access free vaccinations.

From the Working Paper, Part 3

The event of Pentecost marks both the gifting of the Holy Spirit as well as the birthing of the Church. It is an event which charges the community of believers with a task, to change the world, to turn it upside down! The birthing of the church is not an innocent gathering of a community, but it is a subversive symbolic action that is designed to explicate both the nature and the mission of the church.

The events described in Acts 2 describes this symbolically by speaking of a violent wind that breaks into tongues of fire and settles over the heads of those who have gathered together on the day of Pentecost. The description of the Holy Spirit as wind, uncontrolled, moving without asking for permission is once more recalled in this telling. The Holy Spirit as divine being is not the God who can be controlled by the 'mantras' and machinations of the priests or the elect or even the

holy ones, but will go where she will, anointing who she will, speaking to us of a certain wildness that cannot be controlled. Control and discipline are the nature of imperialism, of the military, of war mongers and colonizers. But the Holy Spirit is not the one who is to be associated with these.

Instead tongues of fire break forth and fall on the heads of those who have gathered, tongues of fire were symbols of Caesar, these were imperial symbols that have now settled on a rag-tag group of outcasts and misfits, those who lay at the margins of empire and suffered its oppression. It is upon such as these that the imperial symbols are now being bestowed. What we see is a radical democratization of society from below. The imperial project is subverted by the wildness of the Holy Spirit who comes to turn things upside down and to set free. Pentecost calls us to reconceive power apart from the logic of accumulation. [...]

But the Spirt of Pentecost does not only speak to us of the need for justice but to us as the WCRC it also defines for us the meaning of communion. One thing that power does is to divide people, it is here that the Holy Spirit calls us to be united. In the speaking of other languages, the disciples were not only reaching out to the other, they were also symbolically breaking down the causes of division – that which in fact had created this sense of otherness. [...]

Unity is an important element of the festival of Pentecost. In fact, in several Christian traditions around the world it is the pomegranate that is the symbol of Pentecost. One of the reasons for this is of course that the pomegranate is made up of many seeds that are together in one fruit. What the story in Acts reminds us is that unity in the spirit means that we reconfigure our notions of power as well as ensure that power is directed towards reaching out to the other. While it works to remove divisions, it does not remove difference, it is like many seeds in one fruit.

In our third discernment circle we bring together the idea of witness along with the liturgical calendar of Pentecost. To witness means two things, one of course is the idea of seeing, to witness something is to therefore to also identify with a discerning moment. And in our first circle we were witness to the cries of people across our communion, in our sharing circles this has also been our attempt.

Circle on Being Reformed

From the Worship: Prayer of Reflection from Southeast Asia

Living God, we gathered in 2017 for the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches at Leipzig, united in prayer, seeking to be renewed and transformed, so that the world can be transformed. We acknowledge and confess that the draconian policies of apartheid are still present in many forms in our homes, our communities, our nations, and regions.

Living God, Open Our Hearts to Ponder
Sovereign God, we thank You for You are not only listening to our prayers but also answering them in Your Own ways. You may choose to use a tiny little micro-organism or a great dragon to bring about the desired transformation in us and through us. Certainly, the pandemic has become an instrument in Your mighty hands to use in transforming the world and Your own people whom You have called and sent them into it. While we live amongst the scandalous realities of global apartheid, we also realize the hypocritical realities of ecclesiastical apartheid.

Sovereign God, Open Our Minds to Think
Compassionate God, our way of viewing, and interpreting the signs of the times are conditioned by our own questions and the answers derived from them. Our questions are motivated by our struggles and dreams. The hard conditions may disorient us to see Your sovereign hand from different directions, perceiving the means of grace as an evil hand. It may even lead us to think the evil as good. The Babylonian captivity was Your act for Your people, in order to bring about something good. However, the people of God felt there is nothing good in the exile and they were longing to return to their land. The new normal too for many of us as churches seems to be evil as we perceive it and we want the good old days where we can build up the walls demolished for new normal, resulting in preventing a true transformation which You desire in Your people.

Compassionate God, Open Our Eyes to See
God our Saviour, we react without seeking You in prayer for guidance and wisdom for we think we are wise enough to handle everything with our own hands and in our own ways. We do not take time to reflect theologically before we act, for we have our own premeditated programmes and selfish agendas. We do not take time

to listen to You Oh Lord, for it demands to leave all our loving sinful ways and to choose difficult paths and to carry the cross. We love our comfort zones so much and hate any changes that require self-sacrifices.

God, Our Saviour Open Our Ears to Listen
God, the Holy Spirit, it is our folly to feel good about ourselves while sitting in the pews or standing on the pulpits and taking refuge in our traditional rituals and liturgical forms. We are failing to make our prayers and liturgies to be our inspiration for our actions with our real-life situations. The church walls of ecclesiastical apartheid separate the worship and service, instead of working together and enriching each other to glorify God. Gracious God, turn our directions to walk on the road to Jericho like the Good Samaritan. Open our eyes to see the sacredness, where we can turn our worship into service to You. Release us from all forms of apartheid that bind our hands. Help us to pour ourselves with our oil and wine to relieve the needy. Accompany and strengthen us to walk the extra miles when needed, so the helpless and refugees can find a way for restoration in our time, money and effort. Give us Your sufficient grace to seek corporation instead of competition and to show compassion instead of condemning. Help us to be merciful as You are to us, without demanding any returns from the victims whom we serve.

God, the Holy Spirit. Renew and Transform Our Whole Being
Lord, God of justice and love, have mercy on us and transform our hearts within. So, our action may be reformed to glorify and please you by walking humbly before you! Amen.

Dedication

Make us worthy, o Lord, to serve
the man and women throughout the world
who live and die in poverty and hunger.
give them through our hands,
this day their daily bread,
and by our understanding and love,
give peace and joy.
Amen

From the Sharing

Brian Birch, United Church in Solomon Islands, shared about the situation on the Salomon Islands

Service Sector
The need for education, health and medical services is high in rural areas but the challenges for delivery are significant. The government's presence in remote rural areas is minimal while the church's presence and network is significant. The church owns 104 schools and 3 hospitals and one clinic. The church strives to fill in the service sector gaps.

Rapid Social Change and social issues
Rapid social change continues to happen throughout the church sphere of influence. Ways and means of relating and communicating changes with social media becoming a norm, food preferences and eating habits leads to rise in NCDs, styles of dressing and talking, and so on continue to change. Problems associated with alcohol and substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, violence against women, girls and children and people living with disabilities, marriage and family breakdown, unemployment, criminal and illegal activities increase.

Solomon Islands during the Covid-19 pandemic.
Solomon Islands in 2020 sustained a total of 20 covid-19 cases last year. The 20 patients are fully recovered and to date Solomon Islands is still covid free. On a preventative measure the government extended for the fifth time the State of Public Emergency. Currently, Solomon Islands is still under a State of Public Emergency. Covid-19 Vaccination roll-out is still running. The expected vaccination percentage is still too far from reach as citizens have varied reactions about the vaccine. Front liners including church leaders are amongst the first to take their vaccine. An appeal is made to all government workers and front-line organizations for compulsory injection. Take a jab to come to work or stay home if not vaccinated.

Missional Engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic.
UCSI last year because of the State of Public Emergency downscaled its program and activities. All programs and activities that involved mass gathering of people were put-on hold or cancelled. Public worship in some congregations were streamed, while others continued, however in smaller gatherings with strict observation of

social distancing rules. The UCSI Assembly Office provided Missional Engagement Guidelines to all church members through their various congregations.

Missional Engagement NOW and BEYOND the Covid-19 pandemic.
Redressing of the UCSI Base-line Context before the pandemic. Taking stock under the running theme: Redirecting missions toward fullness of life. Addressing the immediate present & context: ▪ Survival – Pastoral Strengthening – Networking both organizational and Technological – Reflect – Act –Reflect.

From the Working Paper, Part 4

The What does God require of us? Discerning, Confessing and Witnessing in a time of COVID19 and beyond has been intentionally aligned with the liturgical calendar year. Therefore, discernment aligned with advent and Christmas, Confessing aligned with Lent and Easter and witnessing with Pentecost. In our discernment we recognized the divisiveness of the system of global apartheid that we live within. In our confession we called upon the church to be a confessing church, and in witnessing we raised a call of being a prophetic witness to a God of life in a world fallen among thieves. Within this scheme of things, the intention was to align Being Reformed, or Reforming with ordinary time and of course with Reformation Day which falls within ordinary time.

The question that we have to ask, however is what is ordinary? Indeed, as our discernment process has shown the times that we are living in are anything but ordinary. In fact we have used terms like apocalyptic to describe the moment that we are in. And our discernment process has demonstrated how the apocalyptic moment has unveiled the catastrophic crisis that the people and the planet face. On the one hand we are threatened with a mammoth, irreversible climate crisis that threatens to wipe out life on this home we call earth. The recent IPCC document has made this abundantly clear. On the other we live in a moment where inequality has reached astronomic proportions, where some can spend billions on a few minutes in space while others have no clue where their next meal comes from. Racism and patriarchy brutalize bodies and deprive many of dignity and fundamental rights.

And yet while we use bombastic words such as catastrophe, mammoth and astronomic to discern the signs of the times, the fact is that many of these systems of injustice do not have momentous occasions in and through which they have

become hard realities for the oppressed of this planet. The systems of injustice instead worked through normalized, banal, quotidian practices that have later turned into dramatic events that have raised our consciousness to the ugliness of the reality which we face. [...]

And today we face what is being described as a new normal, a normal which has indeed mandated by a pandemic, perhaps even a genuine concern and love for our neighbours, but it is a normal which is being used and being taken advantage of by dominant forces and authoritarian regimes. It is indeed affecting our everyday practices and is reinscribing a new normality which is subservient to illegitimate power. It has allowed for an increased surveillance by governments and an infringing on privacy. It has created a hyper-vigilance of the other among all of us, feeding into and increasing a suspicion of the other. It has hardened international boundaries and hyped nationalism. And within the caste imagination of India has only fed deeper into practices of untouchability. Most of all, it has increased distance and impeded social interaction, which is imperative to the life of the church and the ecumenical movement. The restriction of the body has also restricted the body of Christ which is the church. [...]

But what we need, now more than ever, is to move beyond the normal, into not just a 'new normal' but into another world in which there is justice for the oppressed and abundance of life for all. And the church, the Ekklesia, the radical collective of believers is called to be the initiators of this new community. And baptism is the initiation into this new community. Theologically speaking therefore, it is through Baptism that we enter into the household of God, a household that reaches out in love, service, welcome and acceptance to the other. This does not mean that the 'other' is either extinguished or absorbed into this household but that that in the household of God that otherness is accepted and difference celebrated. It is within this household that hospitality is shared and experienced. From a liberation perspective therefore, baptism would demand dying to systems that deny life, systems such as racism, patriarchy, ableism, neo-liberal capitalism, and rising again to new life in which all belong to the one household of God, a place where justice and peace kiss.

And therefore, in this ordinary time we call upon our communion into a radical embracing of the sacraments that radicalize the normal and normalize the radical. That we go through the waters of baptism into a new community that is welcoming, affirming and celebrating of all of life. That we find a place where everyone is welcome to the table and there is enough for everyone. For isn't this what the church should be?

P1: Fostering a Just Communion

Introduction

Communion begins in the life of the Triune God, who is love. God creates all things in love, redeems through Christ, and enlivens through the Spirit. To live in communion, therefore, is to share in God's own life of love.

This divine communion draws us outward into ever-widening relationships with the whole human family and with all creation. Communion is marked by equality, mutuality, reciprocity, and unity-in-difference. It creates relationships that include rather than exclude, binding people together in ways that reflect God's reconciling love.

Communion is also a process of discernment. It means listening for God's Spirit together in community and paying attention especially to voices that are often silenced. Through this shared discernment, the church is called to stand with those who suffer and to act for truth, justice, and peace in the world.

At the same time, communion includes the act of confession. It is the communal proclamation that Jesus Christ is Lord over all of life. This confession also requires lamenting the church's complicity in injustice, colonialism, division, and exclusion. Communion demands continual justification and sanctification by God, so that our lives—not just our words—bear witness to Christ's love.

Communion is lived out as witness. The church shares in Christ's prophetic, priestly, and royal ministry: proclaiming the good news, reconciling brokenness, resisting injustice, and standing in costly solidarity with the vulnerable. This witness often involves risk but is central to the church's calling.

Communion is not about uniformity but about covenant. It is a mutual commitment to accountability and shared responsibility, rooted in justice for people and the whole creation. In this way, communion becomes a counter-witness to the fragmentation and divisions of the world. The World Communion of Reformed Churches expresses this calling in the phrase: "called to communion and committed to justice."

Finally, communion is sustained in worship. In proclaiming the gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and rejoicing in the unity already given in Christ, believers are incorporated into Christ and one another through the Spirit. Worship reminds the church that communion is a gift received, and at the same time a reality that the church is called to embody and make visible in the world.

The following are the programmes that were done for communion building:

Youth

The WCRC is unequivocally committed to the participation of all young people at all levels of its governance and programme life. In order to implement the directives of the strategic plan, the WCRC intends to hold a youth summit with the explicit purpose of energizing the entire communion through the engagement, participation and leadership of young people. Conceptually the idea of the youth summit would be to bring together those progressive young people from across the communion so that they would be able to offer leadership and vitality to both young people across the communion and the ecumenical movement but also the entire communion and the ecumenical movement itself.

Several online meetings were held with a core group that worked together to develop a concept note for a summit in 2024 with the theme "Shaking the Foundations: Youth and the Ecumenical Imperative". The young people themselves have prepared this concept paper and will be used as the basis for fund raising and seeking partnerships.

Unfortunately due to a lack of funding the summit was unable to be held, however a positive outcome was that it enabled the formation of a youth network

George Lombard Prize

The George Lombard essay was conducted and essays were invited for the theme "Ecumenism from the Margins: Confessing a God of Life in a World Fallen among thieves" and an expert panel made up of some members of the Reformed World Editorial Board and past winners of the Lombard Prize worked to select winners. A total of three prizes were awarded with one honourable mention.

Human Sexuality

In the period between 2017 and 2025 three consultations on human sexuality were conducted. The first was a consultation on Human Sexuality was held in Chennai in India in November 2017. This consultation concentrated on the question of

communion. Around fifty participants from our member churches attended this consultation. The consultation resulted in an agreement to continue to sit together at the table and to read the Bible and study theology together.

While the Chennai processes concentrated on the communion aspects of the question of sexuality, this next consultation was to concentrate on the justice aspects and particularly how the communion may live out actions 56.

This General Council Action Stated that the GC2017

1. condemns all acts of violence against LGBTQ persons, regardless of our theo- logical views, around the globe;
2. confesses its complicity in supporting violence through its silence; and
3. continues to commit itself to working for justice, freedom and a safe world for all persons to flourish.

This consultation was held in November 2023 in Hyderabad which brought together members of the communion, global partners and members of the community. The programme was conducted along with the National Council of Churches in India.

The consultation of 2023 affirmed that grace is the undeserved favor of God freely given to all creation. Human sexuality, in all its diversity, was recognized as a gift from God that should be accepted, valued, and nurtured so that all people may flourish. Because all life is sacred, the theology of sexuality must rest on this truth. The church, as the body of Christ, has a divine duty to make grace tangible and to uphold human rights without prejudice, providing a safe haven for anyone who suffers injustice or discrimination.

Participants acknowledged that many individuals with non-normative sexualities and gender expressions are denied their God-given right to live fully. Within the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) some members experience discrimination, persecution, and even violence. The church has often been slow to respond, hindered by inadequate theological engagement with sexuality. This delay contradicts its mission to glorify God and love neighbors.

The consultation highlighted sexual violence as a pervasive and multifaceted evil—physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. The church has, at times, been complicit through silence, shame, and colonial power structures. Testimonies shared included denial of ministry opportunities, exclusion from the Eucharist, domestic abuse, and spiritual violence. Broader concerns such as honor killings,

human trafficking, intersex and female genital mutilation, conversion therapies, and suicide were also raised.

In response, the consultation urged the church to listen to the voices of those harmed and to stand in solidarity with victims. Churches are called to create safe spaces, speak openly about violence, and advocate for justice, particularly where violence is state-sanctioned or culturally tolerated. Concrete steps proposed include regional and national workshops, online resources on human sexuality, and the development of a robust theology of sexuality. The gathering concluded with a confession of the church's past failures and a renewed commitment to embody Christ's mission so that all may experience life in its fullness.

In response to the actions from the General Council in Leipzig and this consultation a writers workshop on producing a study resource for churches was conducted in Bangkok in November 2024. The workshop brought together 15 writers to produce this resource. The resource is currently in production.

People Living with Disabilities

An issue of the Reformed World on Disabilities was published in 2022. Entitled The Intersections of Church and Disability this issue was guest edited by Terry DeYoung and has 11 articles written by people living with disabilities, advocates and caregivers.

A working paper on Disability: A mandate for the churches was prepared for the general council by bringing a working group together

Indigenous People

Since its Uniting General Council in 2010, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) has made commitments to Indigenous peoples that have not been realized.

At the end of 2019, a detailed proposal for work with indigenous people was proposed. Funding for this process was also secured. However, the pandemic made progress with this process difficult. Two consultations with indigenous people were held

However, in October 2022, we were able to initiate our work with indigenous people with an Asian-level consultation on Theological education and indigenous people. The consultation brought theological educators, mission practitioners, church leaders and seminary students to discuss theological education from an indigenous people's perspective. The consultation resulted in the production of two syllabus for courses from an IP perspective.

A second consultation was held in Newark to coincide with the United Nations Indigenous People's forum. a consultation of Indigenous members of the Communion and ecumenical partners in late April meeting under the theme, "Repentance, Reconciliation, and Redistributive Justice: Indigenous People's Spirituality and Theology."

"The consultation recognized the urgency of the situation facing Indigenous people," said Philip Vinod Peacock, WCRC executive secretary for justice and witness. "In many parts of the world Indigenous people are being killed while in others communities they are being systematically destroyed. Global and ecumenical attention to the cause of Indigenous people is central to our commitment to justice."

Those gathered drafted a paper to be presented to the 2025 General Council. A "request to dialogue," the paper addresses several important topics and includes proposals for meaningful progress.

The paper is included as one of the working papers of the General Council.

Reformation Sunday Worship

To build communion and increase communion relations the World Communion of Reformed Churches began organzing global Reformation Sundays in different parts of the world that were live streamed. Liturgies were prepared and local congregations of the member churches were encouraged to use them. Over the last few years the Reformation Sunday was held in Rome, Jakarta and Grand Cayman.

Member Church and Regional Solidarity

Through direct church visits as well as organzing programmes in different countries the WCRC was able to establish and maintain church relations, regional

solidarity and mediate in contexts of ecclesial conflict where necessary. Visits included North Korea, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Cameroon, India, Sudan, Ghana, South Africa, Equatorial Guinea, Guyana, United States of America, Argentina, Canada, Ukraine, Palestine, Romania, Hungary, The United Kingdom among other countries.

P2: Covenanting for Justice

20 Years of the Accra Confession

The World Communion of Reformed Churches describes itself as called to communion and committed to justice. The commitment to justice has been a historical legacy of the Reformed Churches, many of whom have stood as prophetic witnesses in the contexts in which they minister. The World Communion of Reformed Churches stands within this long legacy of commitment to justice, as exemplified in the Accra confession.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches aims to involve the entire communion in recognising the signs of the times to effectively witness to transformative reformation in the realms of economic, social, gender, and ecological justice so that member churches can faithfully confess to the God of life in a scandalous world (John 10:10). Since Leipzig, the WCRC has endeavoured to deepen and strengthen its existing commitments to justice while simultaneously expanding and developing in line with the vision laid out at the 2017 General Council.

The WCRC seeks to promote justice in a world that is groaning in travail (Rom 8) and fallen among thieves (John 10:10). Over the past eight years, we have witnessed dramatic shifts in the geopolitical landscape that have made the pursuit of justice more urgent and necessary. We are living through a climate catastrophe, with several tipping points already crossed, and the very existence of the planet is at risk. The climate crisis is evident in changing weather patterns worldwide, with anomalies often resulting in natural disasters that cause loss of life and damage to property. It has led to the extinction of species and a loss of biodiversity that was previously unimaginable.

The climate crisis, however, did not arise independently but has its roots in an economic system rooted in the pursuit of limitless growth. Our current economic models, whether capitalism or planned economies, see the earth as a source from which endless resources can be extracted to satisfy an ever-increasing demand. It is as if we treat the environment as a tap for unlimited resource extraction and a sink for unlimited pollution disposal. In capitalism, the drive for continuous growth and possibly exceeding planetary boundaries is driven by an obsession with profit. This obsession with profit has led to the commodification of all aspects of life, including goods, services, and even people.

Neo-Liberal Capitalism, as it exists today, is based on two systems of oppression that Nancy Fraser, in her book Cannibalising Capitalism, names as exploitation and expropriation. By exploitation, she refers to the system of commodifying wages inherent in capitalism. In this system, those who own only their labour engage in an exchange with those who own and control the means of production. Unfortunately, the system is tilted in favour of those who own the means of production, who retain not only the product but also the profit. Fraser, however, suggests that capitalism is rooted in the labour and land of women, racialised communities, and indigenous peoples. This, a system she terms expropriation, is both invisibilised and naturalised. Consequently, women's work—both unpaid domestic and care work—is both invisibilised and undervalued, unpaid and uncounted within the economic system. Similarly, capitalism expanded through colonialism and slavery. Those who benefitted from it did so at the expense of Africans, people of African descent, and people of colour, yet this has largely gone unacknowledged. Likewise, resources, including land and water, were stolen from indigenous peoples, a reality the system fails to account for. The document arising from twenty years of reflection on the Accra Confession references this issue, stating,

The Accra Confession stated that women and children were the worst affected by Mammon. Still, it did not recognise how fundamental hetero-normative patriarchy sustains this system of neo-capitalism. The unseen labour of women and the ongoing system of modern-day slavery and enforced labour uphold our patriarchal capitalist regime. Capitalism systematically devalues and renders invisible both the reproductive and care labour traditionally assigned to women. Our world does not permit equal participation for all.

It further argues, "Coloniality, as the ongoing expression of colonialism, instead of acknowledging past exploitation of resources and the oppression of people, sustains white supremacy and perpetuates the colonial empire. It achieves this by displacing Indigenous people from their land to work in mining for the supposed technological revolution."

As a natural consequence of the climate crisis rooted in an economic system driven by the logic of growth, deep inequality emerges. This inequality is based on class, race, and gender. The recent Oxfam report informs us that billionaire wealth has risen three times faster in 2024 than in 2023, and we can now expect at least five trillionaires by the end of this decade. At the same time, the number of people living in poverty has hardly changed since 1990. The Oxfam report states, "Inequality is out of control".

What worsens the situation is the political influence exerted by the billionaire class. While this was previously done in secret through various lobby groups and 'foundations' funding political actions, it has now become openly evident.

As inequality increases and the actions of the billionaire class become more openly visible, we see that new forms of dictatorship, authoritarianism, and national supremacy are emerging.

WCRC Responding

The magnitude of the multiple levels of the global crisis that we find ourselves in necessitates addressing this at various levels. The World Communion of Reformed Churches has traditionally worked under two horizons. The first is a broader horizon that seeks to bring about systemic change. It is well known now that the questions of injustice facing our world today are rooted in systemic issues and only systemic change will ultimately help to resolve them.

The WCRC has attempted to address these systemic issues in three broad-based ways.

a) The first is to collectively discern, name and flesh out the interconnections between the various injustices we find prevalent in our world today. The best example of this work is the Accra Confession. Over the last seven years, the Justice Desk has continued the legacy of the Accra Confession in two specific ways. First through a discerenment of the signs of the times and a second through commemorating twenty years of the Accra Confession.
b) Secondly by reframing theology to place life issues at the centre particularly through study and capacity building.
c) By mobilizing faith communities towards prophetic witness through our advocacy and campaigning work.

Reading the Signs of the Times

The first is continuing the discerning work that lay at the core of the Accra process. Christian discipleship calls for a continual and critical reading of the signs of the times. This vital and radical discernment is imperative for a life of faith and is necessary for theological, ecclesiological and missiological praxis. Moreover, for

Christian disciples, this reading of the signs of the times is not a neutral task but is done from the perspective of the oppressed.

To participate in the continual and critical task of reading the signs of the times, and in preparation for our General Council 2025 in Chiang Mai with the theme "Persevere in your Witness" the World Communion of Reformed Churches held a consultation on "Reading the Signs of the Times" in Jakarta, Indonesia between the 22 nd and 25 th of October 2023.

The Objective of the consultation were to read the signs of the times from the perspective of those who are left out and are oppressed, to offer an analysis of the different aspects of the power dynamics that are involved. To find a means of naming what is going on and to highlight the interconnections; to discern the implications of this for theology, ecclesiology and missiology; and to propose a theological understanding of the signs of time.

The outcome of the consultation was a statement on the scandalous nature of this world.

Accra Plus Twenty Process

The Accra Confession recognises that creation continues to groan for its liberation. It discerns a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation. It describes the world in which we live as scandalous and names the unjust economic system protected by military and political might as being at the root of the crisis we face. The Accra Confession names neo-liberal economic globalisation and its drive for the accumulation of profit at the cost of people and the earth as a belief system that is contrary to the Christian faith. It recognises that, as an ideology, neo-liberalism presents itself as having no alternative, offering the false promise of salvation while demanding the endless flow of sacrifice from the poor and creation.

Today, amid a climate catastrophe that is caused by neo-liberal capitalism, the relevance of the Accra Confession is even more apparent. Devastating climate change and economic inequality have demonstrated both the prophetic nature of the Accra Confession and the reluctance of the churches to listen to its call. At the same time, the WCRC, along with its ecumenical partners and member churches, have attempted to programmatise the Accra Confession through the NIFEA process

and through the ZacTAX campaign that calls for just taxation to address economic and climate injustice.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches, in response to the 20th Anniversary of the Accra Confession, intends to conduct a series of regional consultations that culminate in a global consultation in December.

Structure of the Consultations

The structure of the three-day consultations celebrates the gains of the Accra Confession in calling the churches to witness for economic and ecological justice on the first day. Confess our complicity in perpetuating environmental and economic injustice on the second day, while we recognise the importance of becoming a confessing church. The final day will work towards realising the need of the church to covenant for justice in the economy and on the earth.

Accra Plus Twenty Consultation, Accra, Ghana

The Accra Plus Twenty process kicked off in Accra, Ghana, to coincide with the date the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches adopted the Accra Confession. That is the 12th of August 2004. A consultation with the African Council of Reformed Churches was held in Accra, Ghana, at the Trinity Theological College. The consultation brought together Reformed church leaders from the African continent to celebrate the Accra Confession, confess our inability to carry out its vision and to covenant together to work for the principles laid out by the Accra Confession. The consultation was held between the 10th and 12th of August 2024 and culminated in a celebratory service.

Accra Plus Twenty Consultation, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands

A one-day consultation was conducted with the Caribbean and North American Area Council. It was part of the Area Council meeting and brought together churches from the CANAAC region. Three sessions were held, each addressing the question of revisiting the Accra Confession from a youth, gender, and missional

perspective. The speakers at the consultation were Rev. Dora Arce Valentin, Rev. Sanya Behary, and Rev. Dr Collin Cowans.

Accra Plus Twenty Consultation, AIPRAL Region

As part of the Accra Plus Twenty process, a consultation on the Accra Confession was conducted in San Salvador, El Salvador. The consultation aimed to reflect on the Accra confession from the perspective of the present realities of the Latin American region. The meeting resulted in a declaration on the Accra Confession from the AIPRAL region.

Accra Plus Twenty Global Consultation

A global consultation on the Accra Confession was held from December 3rd to 5th, 2024, in Hannover, Germany. The consultation brought together 50 theologians, church leaders, activists, and others involved with the Accra Confession. The consultation was divided into three days, each of which concentrated on a different aspect. The first day of celebrating the Accra Confession sought to commemorate the Accra Confession and the gains made by the churches in relating faith and economic justice. The second day examined the Accra Confession and identified gaps, as well as how these could be addressed. It looked at the questions of the legacies of slavery as well as questions of patriarchy, gender and sexuality. The last day looked at covenanting for justice and sought to draw out trajectories on how the Accra Confession could be taken forward. The consultation brought out a document on the continuing legacies of the Accra Confession. The consultation closed with a closing celebratory service at the local Reformed church.

Accra Plus Twenty Resources

Four resources are being planned from the Accra Plus Twenty Process

1. The Accra Plus Twenty Booklet: This is a booklet that will bring together the Accra Confession, the Accra Plus Ten Declaration and the Accra Plus Twenty Declaration. The booklet is almost complete.

2. Accra Confession Theology Book: A publication of an academic book is being planned and is in the process
3. Accra Confession Graphic Novel: A graphic novel on the Accra confession is being planned to make the confession accessible for young people
4. Accra Confession Study Guide: A study guide for churches and congregations on the Accra Confession is also being planned for this year.

NIFEA

Apart from long-term strategies for addressing the present crises, the WCRC also worked on the NIFEA process with other ecumenical organisations. The New International and Financial Architecture Process was an initiative of the WCRC after it was directed by the 2010 Uniting General Council to implement and program the Accra Confession. Initially joined by the World Council of Churches and the Council for World Mission, later the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council and the United Society for Partners in the Gospel also joined, truly making NIFEA an ecumenical coalition.

NIFEA is directed at developing an action plan towards constructing just, caring and sustainable global financial and economic structures. The starting point was a consultation in Brazil in 2012, organised by the WCC, WCRC and CWM and with the participation of LWF, that resulted in the "Sao Paulo Statement on International Financial Transformation for an Economy of Life." The statement declares that:

> *"The God of the oppressed calls us into an alternative imagination which has to emerge from the margins, from those who have been left out of socio-political and economic decision making but are the first to suffer its consequences.*
>
> *We therefore seek a transformative theological praxis that not only delegitimises, displaces and dismantles the present social and economic order but also envisions alternatives that emerge from the margins. There is thus a requirement for an active radicalising of our theological discourse that will no longer allow too much power to be placed into capitalist ideologies that have resulted in an inability to think beyond existing financial and economic structures."*
>
> Following the gathering in Brazil, the Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA, an expert panel of theologians, church leaders, economists and activists, was

convened by the WCC, WCRC, LWF and CWM to "give legs" to the Sao Paulo statement and to serve as an advisory body. The Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA produced the document, "Economy of Life for All Now: An Ecumenical Action Plan for a NIFEA" in 2014, which outlines action areas for churches in tackling public finance and debt, regulation of the financial sector and global economic governance.

3rd Meeting of the Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA

The Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA has had three face-to-face meetings. The last face-to-face meeting took place in April 2018 in New York with the participation of 9 (out of 13 panel members), general secretaries and staff from WCC, WCRC, CWM and LWF, as well as representatives from the Roman Catholic Church, the Poor People's Campaign and Oxfam.

The meeting had the following objectives:

- To analyse the signs of the times for the economy and the earth;
- To identify emerging and persisting elements of economic and climate injustice and the key issues ahead;
- To set up a process to update the NIFEA Plan, primarily the priority actions, in light of the above and our findings so far; and
- To strategise new actions and partnerships as we advocate for the analysis and transformation of NIFEA.

The meeting reiterated that:

> "Current economic systems pose a profound obstacle to...justice and peace...The pursuit of profit, when it is held up as an ultimate value in itself and when it becomes the purpose of life, is sinful. The divisiveness of this pursuit of the illusion of limitless profit and growth is spawning violence, inequality and climate change. It obscures the vision of God for unity, peace, and plenty for all of God's creation. We have not heeded God's calls for an end to these injustices, and some have even claimed God is part of this market system with his blessing and prosperity to bestow. Christians and churches must see that the fullness of life they identify in Jesus is being sold short if they do not claim it for all of the

earth, all of humanity and for how we are called to live in community and creation in love and grace. The gift of the earth, the gift of life is a divine act of love and grace, and so the ethos and spirit we are called to embody in our lives, systems, and relationships should allow love and grace to abound."

The meeting highlighted four key strategic issues:

- NIFEA is vital to the mission calling and programmatic plans of the four sponsoring organisations, and we are committed anew to coordinating our work together.
- The four organisations must redouble our efforts to work together on the NIFEA agenda, especially as the time for mitigating the ecological crises caused by our economic system is running out.
- Wider collaboration is imperative to creating economic change. There is a larger movement to engage with, and the issues are so critical at all levels of life that we should play our part in developing critical partnerships at global, regional, national, and local levels, which build resilience, critique, and change.
- This is not work of economic justice alone, but also of ecological, gender and racial justice. Our work needs to observe and work at all the justice intersections of NIFEA.

The meeting discerned the following elements as key to the work of the NIFEA process:

- Taxation as a tool for promoting redistribution, accountability and sustainability
- Investing in ecological sustainability and other "public goods"
- Reparations for social and environmental debts
- Developing post-growth alternatives
- Building alliances and addressing intersectionality

Building on this, the staff coordination team, composed of staff from the convening organisations, developed a three-year work plan (2019-2021):

Consultations, campaigns and the annual Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management for an Economy of Life (GEM School) will address specific themes

- 2019: addressing inequality and climate change through taxation and reparations
- 2020: addressing debt through just finance and democratisation of global financial institutions
- 2021: addressing sustainability through transformations in consumption and production patterns and exploring alternatives to growth-oriented models.
- Activities are expected to contribute to movement-building and networking; have an interfaith element; and work intersectionally.

Activities

Education and training

Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management for an Economy of Life (GEM School)

Realising that our churches' ethical, moral and theological perspectives on the global economy have a minimal impact on financial and economic policies, business practices and ways of thinking, the GEM school was initiated to build economic literacy within churches by equipping participants with the tools and language to effectively advocate for urgent transformations in the global financial and economic realm. In other words, to develop economic empowerment for transformation within the ecumenical movement.

More specifically, GEM School:

- Identifies the theological starting points for economic justice and deepens understanding of the nature and logic of the relationship between theology, ethics and economics;
- Provides a basic understanding of mainstream economic thinking.
- Identifies, relativises and contextualises methodologies and normative fundamentals of economics; and
- Widens the horizon of economics by introducing ecological, feminist and other pluralistic approaches.

The 3rd GEM school was held in Mexico City, Mexico, from 20 August to 1 September 2018, bringing together 17 participants. Following this, the NIFEA staff

coordinating team held an evaluation and planning meeting. The significant recommendations that evolved were a streamlining of the GEM school curriculum to meet the objectives of the GEM school and adapt it to the recommendations of the 3rd NIFEA Panel meeting. The evaluation also called for adjustments to its pedagogical method and syllabus.

The 4th GEM School took place in Bogor, Indonesia, from 19 to 30 August 2019, with a focus on the theme of taxation and reparations.

Originally intended to take place in Taiwan, the 5th GEM school moved to a hybrid model in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It offered public webinars, closed group tutoring and participation in other NIFEA consultations to its participants. The public webinars included opening lectures on "Economy of Life in a Time of Pandemic and Climate Change," a session on "Zacchaeus Tax and Jubilee Now," and a panel on "Interfaith Perspectives on Just Finance and Reparations" (read more below).

Discerning the limits and benefits of online learning platforms, the NIFEA staff coordinating team decided not to convene GEM School in 2021 as the pandemic continued to rage. Instead, the GEM School manual was conceptualised and initiated to gather a variety of perspectives in alternative economic and theological thinking for an Economy of Life and serve as a resource for future students. It is targeted for publication in 2022 for use in the next GEM School, scheduled to take place from 04 to 08 July 2022 in Berlin, Germany.

Following online sessions that were convened from 2020 to 2021, the second phase of the 5th edition of GEM School took place physically from 04 to 08 July 2022, in Berlin, Germany. The latest edition of GEM School brought together 17 church leaders and young activists representing different countries and denominations. Participants took part in a 5-day programme, learning the fundamentals of finance and economics, pluralistic and intersectional approaches to economics (e.g. feminist economics, ecological economics), the theological underpinnings and ethical implications of economics, the Ecumenical Action Plan for a NIFEA, and the Zacchaeus Tax campaign. It included a visit to Bread for the World to learn about their work on economic justice.GEM School produced a range of project proposals to promote economic justice.

Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management for an Economy of Life (GEM School), 21 August-01 September 2023, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

A joint undertaking of the WCC, WCRC, LWF, WMC, and the CWM as part of the NIFEA initiative and hosted by the Council of Churches in Malaysia (CCM), the

6th edition of the GEM gathered 24 participants to rethink economic systems for a more equitable, sustainable planet.

Participants came from more than 20 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, and the Pacific. They included church leaders, pastors, and theological students, as well as finance experts, economic justice advocates, and eco-activists to promote intergenerational and multidisciplinary dialogue and learning.

The programme explored the intersections between faith and economic justice through Bible studies, equipped participants with basic economics and advocacy tools, and explored alternative economic thinking and policy recommendations.

GEM School produced a range of project proposals – including campaigns for tax justice and reparations and organising mini GEM Schools in some countries – to promote economic justice in local contexts.

Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics, and Management for an Economy of Life, 19-30 August 2024, Limuru, Kenya

Hosted by the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCK), the 7th edition of GEM School gathered 27 participants to rethink economic systems for a more equitable, sustainable planet. The participants included church leaders, pastors, theological students, finance, economics, and ecological justice experts. They came from 23 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, and the Pacific.

GEM School introduced participants to feminist, ecological and decolonial economic perspectives and proposals.

Participants produced project proposals to promote economic justice, such as a North-South campaign for debt cancellation. Participants are expected to share their learnings with their churches and to use their learnings to implement projects in their communities.

Campaigns

Zacchaeus Tax (ZacTax) Campaign

The ZacTax campaign is rooted in the transformative story of Zacchaeus, advocating for tax justice and addressing social and ecological debts, including reparations for colonialism and slavery, at local, national and global levels. The campaign serves to educate our churches about the issues involved while advocating for tax justice and reparations internationally.

The ZacTax campaign demands global tax justice, specifically:

(1) the enactment of progressive wealth taxes to curb the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of an increasingly powerful few, hand-in-hand with increased public spending to stamp out poverty;

(2) a stop to tax evasion and avoidance by multinational corporations and affluent individuals;

(3) progressive carbon and pollution taxes at different levels to protect our only planetary home; and

(4) the immediate implementation of a financial transaction tax on trade in equities, bonds, currencies and derivatives to curb harmful speculative activities.

The campaign also calls for reparations for slavery and other social and ecological debts financed through taxation and debt cancellation.

Research to support the ZacTax campaign was conducted in 2021, including strengthening the reparations dimension of the campaign. The study reviewed the economic underpinnings of the ZacTax model of a global wealth tax, mapped movements working for reparation, provided an overview of models of reparation in practice, and recommended strategies for engaging churches and building partnerships around the ZacTax calls as linked to reparations, debt, and planetary repair.

The ZacTax Toolkit was also produced in 2021

ZacTax Relaunch in Africa, 20 May 2023, Johannesburg, South Africa
The ZacTax Campaign was relaunched in an event that gathered more than 50 church leaders, GEM School alums, civil society activists for tax justice, as well as parliamentarians, mainly from the African region. Panels offered faith-rooted African perspectives on just taxation and reparations. They shared concrete proposals to curb illicit financial flows and to advance corporate and wealth taxation as well as social and ecological reparations. Reformed churches in South Africa hosted the event. It was co-organised by the NIFEA sponsoring organisations as well as the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), which now promotes the ZacTax campaign in the African region. By bringing together key stakeholders and deepening

theological reflection, the event strengthened African churches' engagement in tax justice advocacy.

ZacTax Video, 2024[5]
A video was produced to visually share the ZacTax Campaign. It highlights the role of taxation as an essential tool for sharing wealth equitably within and across countries as well as for holding corporations and citizens accountable for their responsibility towards upholding the common good, including care for the global ecological commons. It relays the biblical story of Zacchaeus, and how the ZacTax Campaign seeks to transform both national and international taxation systems to promote equity and sustainability.

Turn Debt into Hope Campaign, 2025
Initiated at the start of 2025, a Jubilee year, the NIFEA co-sponsoring organisations helped to conceptualise and join the global ecumenical "Turn Debt into Hope" campaign, which amplifies the moral and ethical imperative to reform unjust financial systems for the good of people and the planet. The key calls of the campaign are:

- Cancel and restructure unjust and unsustainable debt—immediately and without harmful economic policy conditions.
- Address the root causes of debt crises by reforming global financial systems to prioritise people and ecological wellbeing over profit.
- Establish a transparent and just debt framework under the United Nations to ensure fairness and accountability.

Consultations, workshops, and webinars

NIFEA workshop on "Just Taxation and Reparations," 16-20 March 2019, Durban, South Africa
The workshop on Just Taxations and Reparations was called together in Durban, South Africa, from 16 to 20 March 2019 to strategise on how churches can deepen advocacy for global tax reform and reparations. Durban was chosen as the location because the city is historically significant for the United Nations (UN) World Conference Against Racism held there in 2001. Hosted by the Uniting Church of South Africa and with nearly 30 participants from around the world in attendance, the workshop explored common ground and built bridges between the movement for

[5] See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duTbqpwzwLw&t=7s]

tax justice and the movement for reparations within and among churches and civil society. It resulted in the ecumenical ZacTax Campaign.

NIFEA side-event on "Taxation and Reparations: Tools for Equity, Climate Justice and an Economy of Life" and Launch of the ZacTax Campaign, 11 July 2019, New York, USA

The ZacTax campaign had its global launch in New York on 11 July 2019 as part of a side-event titled "Taxation and Reparations: Tools for Equity, Climate Justice and an Economy of Life" organised on the occasion of the UN High-level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals. The event brought together some members of the Ecumenical Panel, NIFEA experts, taxation experts, and reparations experts. Aside from the NIFEA co-sponsoring organisations, the event was held in partnership with the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Methodist Church Global Ministries. The ZacTax Campaign was also launched for African churches in November 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya, as part of an initiative of the African Communion of Reformed Churches.

4th Meeting of the Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA: NIFEA E-Consultation on Economy of Life in a Time of Pandemic, 17 and 24 April 2020 (online)

A series of two e-consultations, held on 17 and 24 April 2020, brought together the Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA, the leadership of the NIFEA sponsoring organisations, and other ecumenical partners to reflect on the socio-economic-ecological impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and how the crisis also offers the world an opportunity to rethink and reshape financial and economic systems so that these give priority to ensuring and investing in the health and well-being of communities and the planet. The meeting helped to produce the timely WCC-WCRC-LWF-CWM message, "Calling for an Economy of Life in a Time of Pandemic" (read more below).

NIFEA/GEM School webinar on "Economy of Life in a time of Inequality, Pandemic and Climate Change," 19 August 2020 (online)

Serving as the opening session of GEM School 2020 online, the webinar featured lectures by Prof Cynthia Moe-Loebeda and Rev Dr Allan Aubrey Boesak and provided participants with theological and ethical perspectives to engage society as they respond to the current economic crisis in a time of inequality, pandemic and climate change.

NIFEA/GEM School webinar on "Zacchaeus Tax and Jubilee Now!," 14 September 2020 (online)

Bringing together economists and theologians, the webinar explored the role of taxation, reparations and debt cancellation in shaping an Economy of Life in the current landscape marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, widening socio-economic inequalities and a burgeoning climate emergency. It offered faith-rooted and gender-just perspectives as well as shared concrete proposals for financial and economic transformation as part of the ecumenical ZacTax and Jubilee Debt campaigns.

NIFEA/GEM School webinar on "Interfaith Perspectives on Just Finance and Debt," 02 October 2020 (online)

The event featured a panel of experts from Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Rastafari traditions reflecting on debt cancellation and reparations as tools for promoting justice, sustainability and life-affirming economies. It served both as a GEM School webinar and the public opening session of the Interfaith E-Consultation on Just Finance and Debt (read more below).

NIFEA interfaith e-consultation on "Just Finance and Debt," 02, 12 and 16 October 2020 (online)

Starting with a public webinar on "Interfaith Perspectives on Just Finance and Debt," the NIFEA e-consultation brought together experts and representatives of different faiths to discuss debt cancellation and reparations as tools for promoting justice, sustainability, and life-affirming economies. In particular, the consultation addressed the following questions: What do our faith perspectives have to say on the issue of debt and how it affects people's lives? How can international financial structures be made to align with our faith-rooted values and visions? What kind of proposals can we put forward for debt action and securing a post-COVID-19, post-debt, post-growth, and life-affirming future for all?

Two follow-up closed consultations on 12 and 16 October 2020, gathering interfaith partners and the Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA, produced an interfaith message titled, "Just Economics for Liberation and Life." The interfaith message calls, among others, for releasing countries in the global south from damaging external debt (read more below). The conference was initially meant to be a face-to-face event.

NIFEA webinar on "Indigenous Peoples and the Economy of Life: Spirituality. Land and Self-determination," 22 April 2021 (online)

Convened in parallel with the 20th UN Permanent Forum Indigenous Peoples' Forum taking place from 19 to 30 April, the webinar highlighted the voices of Indigenous Peoples and their understandings of the Economy of Life. The panel, composed of Indigenous activists, church and community leaders, reflected on how the confluence of the three "Cs" of capitalism, colonialism and Christianity has deepened the experience of exploitation, marginalisation, and displacement for many Indigenous communities. Panellists focused on concepts of reparation and restoration, the notion of "land as life," the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), offering alternative and holistic visions of prosperity and development that embrace all creation and what this could look like in current society.

NIFEA webinar on "ZacTax: A Reparatory Tax System for a Just and Sustainable Recovery," 25 June 2021 (online)

Addressing the G20 International Taxation Symposium, the webinar brought together economists, activists, and church representatives to explore how proposals for tax justice and reparations – as called for in the ecumenical ZacTax campaign – could help the world attain a just and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The webinar inputs and discussions helped to craft the NIFEA letter to the G20 finance ministers participating in the International Taxation Symposium (read more below).

NIFEA e-consultation on "Degrowth – Living Sufficiently and Sustainably," 01 October 2021 (online)

The online conference titled "Degrowth – Living Sufficiently and Sustainably," held on 01 October in two sessions, explored the following questions: How do we address the contradictions between modern society's obsession with limitless economic growth and the ecological limits of our only planetary home? Are there models of the good life that meet the needs of all people, share wealth and power, whilst nurturing the environment? What resources do we have, and what strategies can we employ as faith communities to empower a just and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a just transition from a growth-oriented, extractivist economic paradigm to a life-affirming economy where all of God's creation can flourish?

Gathering over 50 participants, the online consultation discussed the stark findings of the first part of the sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as well as proposals and strategies for moving away from growth-driven and extractive economies to life-affirming systems of sustenance. The consultation helped to shape the NIFEA letter addressed to world leaders attending the G20 Summit in Rome (read more below).

NIFEA workshop on "Tax the Rich, Save the Planet," 07 November 2021, Glasgow, Scotland

Held during the 27th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and as part of the People's Summit for Climate Justice, the workshop explored how a global tax system can deliver equity and make reparations for the exploitation of people and planet. In particular, a range of experts from churches and civil society looked at how wealth and carbon taxes – as urged for by the ZacTax campaign – could slow down greenhouse gas emissions, as well as raise climate finance and resource reparations for loss and damage for low-income and climate-vulnerable countries that contribute least to climate change. A biblical reflection on the Zacchaeus story was also offered.

NIFEA side-event on "Debt and Climate Finance: Faith Perspectives and Proposals" at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) Spring Meetings Civil Society Policy Forum, 11 April 2022 (online)

In dialogue with the IMF and WB, church, civil society and government representatives reflected on the intersections between climate change and indebtedness from faith-rooted and ethical perspectives. Concrete policy proposals to address these intersecting concerns were discussed.

5th Meeting of the Ecumenical Panel on NIFEA, 11-13 October 2022, Bali, Indonesia

Ahead of the G20 Summit in Bali, the Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA as well as resource persons and observers from regional thinktanks, hosting churches, Roman Catholic Church, and other faiths (around 30 in-person participants and five online participants) met to identify emerging and persisting elements of financial, economic, and climate injustice and to discern priority areas for engagement for new and renewed actions and alliances. Hosted by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia and local churches in Bali, the meeting produced inputs for the development of a 3-year NIFEA action plan. It helped to shape a letter addressed to the G20.

Side-event on "Debt and Climate Finance: Faith Perspectives and Proposals" at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) Spring Meetings Civil Society Policy Forum, 11 April 2022 (online)

In dialogue with the IMF and WB, church, civil society and government representatives reflected on the intersections between climate change and indebtedness from faith-rooted and ethical perspectives at the subject side-event held as part of the IMF-WB Spring Meetings Civil Society Policy Forum. Concrete policy proposals to address these intersecting concerns were discussed.

Consultation on Converging Food and Debt Crises, 12 April 2023 (online)

An online consultation was convened on 12 April for churches to consider and address the converging food and debt crises. The event brought together more than 50 church representatives, ecumenical partners, and civil society actors; examined the intersections and roots of the intertwined crises with inputs from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, North America, and Europe; and discussed possible joint responses as churches. The virtual side-event was co-organised by the WCC, WCRC, LWF, WMC and CWM.

Side-event on "Converging Food, Fuel and Debt Crises" at the UN Financing for Development Forum, 17 April 2023, New York, USA

As part of the NIFEA initiative, the side-event, which brought civil society and faith-rooted voices, discussed the converging food, fuel, and debt crises; impacts on vulnerable communities; and proposals for the way forward. The side-event called for inclusive, democratic, transparent, and accountable global economic governance and urged churches, faith-based communities, and the ecumenical movement to support civil society-led initiatives to advocate reforms in the international financial architecture to tackle the converging crises.

NIFEA Consultation on Labour, 21-23 August 2023, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Theologians, church delegates, activists, academics, representatives from the International Labour Organisation, and GEM School participants came together for a discussion on the theological implications of labour, key labour issues today, and emerging challenges, including climate change and the 4th industrial revolution. The consultation marked a re-engagement by global communions in labour concerns. It showcased examples of churches' campaigns and projects for just wages and the protection of labour rights.

Serving as local host, the CCM organised an immersion programme, highlighting the situation of migrant workers and refugees in Malaysia who do not have the right to work. CCM offered a dinner where key church leaders in Malaysia interacted with participants of the consultation, strengthening ecumenical relations and informing churches in Malaysia about WCC initiatives for economic justice.

The consultation concluded by issuing a theological communique on labour, which states that: "Places of work and labour are the places of greatest diversity, bringing together people of all races, genders, ages, and abilities, providing the ground for solidarity." It urged churches, the broader ecumenical movement, and society to engage in conscientization. This process empowers people to identify unjust sociopolitical structures that hinder the realisation of our full humanity. It encourages organising workers and forming solidarity with industrial workers, agricultural labourers, migrant workers, and refugees. Moreover, it emphasises active participation in building alternatives, including worker cooperatives and community-based projects.

NIFEA Consultation on G20, 04 September 2023, Delhi, India

Convened as part of the NIFEA initiative and at the same time as the G20 summit in New Delhi, India, the event gathered social thinkers, community activists, theologians, and religious leaders, mainly from India, to engage with the G20 process hosted by the Indian government. The gathering called for "radical alternatives" to be reimagined as an alternative to capitalism, state domination, patriarchy, ableism, cis-heteronormativity, and all forms of racism and casteism."

Side-event on "Zacchaeus Tax: Transforming the Global Economic System and Advancing Gender Justice," at the 68th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 19 March 2024, New York, USA

A panel discussion, "Zacchaeus Tax: Transforming the Global Economic System and Advancing Gender Justice," on 19 March explored the intersections between tax justice and gender justice—and why this is a matter of faith. The event was held in parallel with the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which had the theme "Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective." The panel explored how proposals for global and national wealth and taxes, as well as reparations—as called for in the ecumenical Zacchaeus Tax (ZacTax) campaign—can help build a more just

and sustainable planet, including for women and girls. The session also shared the briefing paper, ZacTax for Gender Justice, which highlights the links between tax justice and gender justice.[6]

Side-event titled "Can taxing the rich help to close the gender divide? And why should we care?" at the UN Financing for Development Forum, 23 April 2024, New York, USA
The WCC and its partners organised a side event on 23 April in conjunction with the UN Financing for Development Forum, which took place from 22 to 25 April. The side event, titled "Can taxing the rich help to close the gender divide? And why should we care?" featured a panel discussion that explored how tax policy, especially capital and wealth taxation, can shape a more gender-just world.

Engagement in the UN Financing for Development Preparatory Session, 22-26 July 2024, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
A delegation from the NIFEA sponsoring organisations, comprising African church, women and youth leaders, attended the first UN Preparatory Committee (Prep Com) session for the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) held in Addis Ababa from 22 to 26 July. A roundtable discussion brought together a diverse group of ecumenical, interfaith and civil society actors, including representatives from the AACC, WCC, LWF, Norwegian Church Aid, and Christian Aid. The discussions centred on key issues such as debt, tax justice, and climate finance, to develop a common ecumenical strategy for the FfD4 process.

NIFEA Consultation on "Land as Commons, not Commodity," 21-23 August 2024, Limuru, Kenya
The NIFEA Consultation on "Land as Commons, not Commodity" took place from 28 to 30 August 2024 in Limuru, Kenya. The event brought together nearly 60 theologians, faith actors, researchers, and land activists to explore faith-based responses to global land issues, emphasising land's role as a commons, not a commodity. It reflected on theological teachings regarding land and the common good, critiquing economic systems that reduce land to a commodity. Discussions focused on the relationship between land, labour, capital, and technology, as well as strategies for promoting an economy that values land as a shared resource. Participants from various countries, including Indigenous communities, shared testimonies about land struggles as well as alternative conceptions of land.

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[6] See: [https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/zactax-for-gender-justice].

Serving as local host, the NCCK organised an immersion visit to a church community, including displaced Indigenous Ogiek people whose ancestral lands have been taken for economic development despite legal victories.

Participants at the consultation produced a Theological Communiqué on Land as Commons, committing themselves to promoting economic visions that recognise land as a commons. The communiqué called for repentance from anthropocentric ideologies and a renewed dedication to listening to the land. It also urged churches to take concrete steps, such as converting church-owned land into community spaces and conducting fact-finding missions to uncover instances of land grabbing. The communiqué further underscored the need for an ecumenical land rights movement to address land injustice on a global scale.

Webinar on "ZacTax – Delivering Climate Reparations through Global Tax Justice," 04 October

In support of the NIFEA programme, the WCC Commission on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development hosted a webinar, "ZacTax – Delivering Climate Reparations through Global Tax Justice" on 4 October ahead of the UN Climate Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan. The event offered a theological reflection on tax justice. It explored the role of global tax justice in addressing climate reparations, with leading voices from Asia, Africa, and the Americas discussing how tax systems can curb the emissions of wealthy nations and industries and raise resources to respond to climate-related loss and damage.

Messages

Message on the occasion of the 3rd UN Financing for Development Forum, 24 April 2018

Following the 3rd meeting of the Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA, the WCC, WCRC, LWF, and CWM issued a joint message reflecting on key economic challenges ten years after the global financial crisis of 2008 on the occasion of the 3rd UN Financing for Development Forum. It asserts:

> "Current economic systems pose a profound obstacle to the justice and peace we need as one humanity for our life together, today and tomorrow. The pursuit of profit, when it is held up as an ultimate value in itself and when it becomes the purpose of life, is sinful. The divisiveness of this pursuit of the illusion of limitless profit and growth is spawning violence, in-

> equality and climate change. It obscures the vision of God for unity, peace, and plenty for all of God's creation. We have not heeded God's calls for an end to these injustices, and some have even claimed God is part of this market system with his blessing and prosperity to bestow. Christians and churches must see that the fullness of life they identify in Jesus is being sold short if they do not claim it for all of the earth, all of humanity and for how we are called to live in community and creation in love and grace."

Calling for an Economy of Life in a Time of Pandemic, 15 May 2020

The online meeting of the Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA held in April 2020 produced a joint message responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and its far-reaching economic, social and ecological consequences. The WCC-WCRC-LWF-CWM message titled, "Calling for an Economy of Life in a Time of Pandemic," reads in conclusion:

> "The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the fact that we live together in a common economic, social, and ecological home. Our response to this global health crisis and the more colossal, longer-standing economic and ecological emergency must recognise our intrinsic interdependence and hold together economic, social, and ecological objectives. This calls for cooperation and solidarity within and across countries, embodied in networks of faith communities, civil society, and social movements, as well as fresh systems of global governance rooted in justice, care, and sustainability. Through such action and in that spirit, ways can be found, if we are bold, to root our systems, powers and hearts not in the old order, but in the new creation."

Just Economics for Liberation and Life, 16 October 2020

Produced by the NIFEA Interfaith E-consultation on Just Finance and Reparations, the interfaith message released on 16 October 2020 captures faith-rooted reflections on finance and calls for lasting solutions to the debt crisis faced by low-income and middle-income countries. It asserts:

> "We envision democratic, participatory and accountable international financial institutions; a move away from financial structures that are based on the principles of interest and usury to economies of care, mutuality and solidarity; and the development of systems of reparation and restitution."

Advocacy letters

NIFEA letter to G20 finance ministers in light of COVID-19 challenges, 13 July 2020
Following the release of the message, "Calling for an Economy of Life in a Time of Pandemic," the WCC, WCRC, LWF and CWM sent a joint letter to the G20 finance ministers last July 2020, stating:

> "This moment offers us an unprecedented opening to examine the current order collectively and to 'build back better' a different system that nurtures the health, well-being and resilience of communities and the planet for generations to come. Here we would like to underline that COVID-19 recovery measures and policies must be compatible with urgent and ambitious action to address the climate crisis."

The letter calls for social protection, debt cancellation, the implementation of the ZacTax proposals, among other critical policy reforms, to empower countries to effectively and sustainably respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

NIFEA letter to G20 leaders calling for action on the debt crisis, 17 November 2020
A letter to world leaders meeting for the annual G20 Summit in Riyadh was sent by the WCC, WCRC, LWF and CWM, urging easing of pressure on countries being suffocated by debt, especially in a time of pandemic. It points out that:

> "The economic impact from the pandemic has lengthened the already long list of developing and middle-income countries in sovereign debt distress. Yet even amid the ongoing global health emergency, hundreds of billions of dollars continue to be directed away from life-saving public health and social service systems, towards debt payments."

The letter offers concrete proposals to address the debt crisis affecting middle-income and income-poor countries.

NIFEA letter to G20 finance ministers urging for global tax reform, 05 July 2021
In a letter to the G20 finance ministers ahead of the International Tax Symposium, the WCC, WCRC, LWF, CWM, and WMC called for urgent reforms to fix our broken global tax system in light of the challenges posed by the worldwide pandemic. The letter highlights that:

"As the most sustainable source of revenue, tax systems have a pivotal role to play in bolstering social sector initiatives and financing the recovery from the crisis. No doubt the impact of the crisis on many countries' fiscal health will be significant and long-lasting. Still, robust and transparent tax systems offer a pathway out of deficit and debt to a more equitable and sustainable future."

NIFEA letter to G20 leaders on economic transformations to tackle the climate emergency, 25 October 2021

Addressing the G20 Summit in Rome ahead of the 26th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework on Climate Change, the joint WCC-WCRC-LWF-CWM-WMC letter underlines that:

> "Unless a radical change is made to the current economic model, the goals of the Paris Agreement will not be met, and the climate crisis will not be averted...The climate emergency demands deep-seated transformations towards net-zero economies by the middle of the century, within a framework of justice and solidarity."

Among others, the letter urges G20 leaders to release countries, especially those at the forefront of climate change effects, from their onerous and historic external debts to break costly build-rebuild cycles that push these countries further into debt. The letter also highlights the need for progressive carbon and pollution taxes at various levels, substantial investments in climate protection and the restoration of ecosystems, and incentivising a rapid and transition away from fossil fuel dependence to clean, renewable and community-based energy systems.

NIFEA letter to G20 leaders on intertwined economic, social and ecological crises, 07 November 2022

Addressing the G20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia, the joint WCC-WCRC-LWF-CWM-WMC letter discerned three interrelated, interconnected crises affecting the planet – a social crisis from rising inequalities, a climate catastrophe, and a broader economic crisis.

> "In addition, today we are faced with an alarming food crisis, made worse by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, adding to a set of weather-related disasters." Among others, the letter urged G20 leaders to adopt new economic and well-being indicators, as well as stronger rules to curb financial speculation on food, energy, and other vital commodities. "Ensuring health-

> care provision, increasing access to education for all girls and women, and expanding support to struggling families and small farmers practising natural land regeneration and agro-ecology are critical for protecting livelihoods and helping farmers cope with rising fuel prices and fertiliser shortages," the letter also suggests.

NIFEA open letter to G20 leaders on growing inequalities, 04 September 2023
Responding to the G20 Summit in New Delhi, India, the joint WCC-WCRC-LWF-WMC-CWM letter expressed concern over widening socio-economic inequalities across and within countries. It urged the G20 leaders to, among other measures, support a UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation. "Global tax discussions must take place under the aegis of the UN, where there is broad participation of countries and civil society," the letter noted.

> "A legally-binding UN tax convention promoting fairer and more inclusive international tax rules would curb illicit financial flows and tax evasion by multinational corporations and super wealthy individuals, and enable developing countries to mobilise domestic resources."

NIFEA open letter to UN General Assembly on a UN Tax Convention, 16 October 2023
The NIFEA collective delivered a letter to the UN General Assembly to continue to advance the process of providing a legally binding UN Convention on Tax. "Such a convention is necessary to effectively combat illicit financial flows and tax evasion and avoidance by multinational corporations (MNCs) and affluent individuals, including through the development of unitary methods of corporate taxation to ensure that MNCs pay taxes where economic activities occur, closing tax havens, and publishing country-by-country reports of profits," reads the letter.

NIFEA open letter to G20 leaders on "Building a Just World and a Sustainable Planet," 04 September 2024
Addressing the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the joint WCC-WCRC-LWF-WMC-CWM letter embraced the theme of the 2024 G20 Leaders' Summit, "Building a Just World and a Sustainable Planet." The letter observed that the super-rich are overwhelmingly responsible for the climate breakdown. "Averaging 2.6 million tons of CO2 per year, each billionaire's investment emissions are comparable to 400,000 years of consumption emissions by the average person or 2.6 million years of consumption emissions by someone living in the poorest 50% of the world," the

text notes. “We need to fix inequality at national and global levels now to heal social divisions, protect democracy, and tackle the greatest challenge facing humanity today – climate change.” The letter welcomed the proposal of the G20 Presidency to levy a wealth tax on billionaire fortunes.

Publications

ZacTax Toolkit, 2021

To both educate and enable churches to organise around the issue of tax justice, nationally and globally, the NIFEA sponsoring organisations released the *ZacTax Toolkit* in 2021. The publication introduces the ZacTax campaign and contains analytical pieces, theo-biblical reflections, and practical advocacy tips on tax justice.

GEM School Manual (in progress)

The GEM School manual will gather a variety of perspectives in alternative economic and theological thinking for an Economy of Life, serving as an essential resource for GEM School students and possibly a different way of offering GEM School post-pandemic. It is targeted for release in 2023.

Theologically Reflecting on Money and Cryptocurrency.

In the face of widening inequality and a rapidly evolving economic landscape, faith leaders, theologians, and economists from around the world convened in Kuala Lumpur from October 2-4, 2024, for a groundbreaking consultation hosted by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM).

Participants explored the deep intersections between money, faith, and economic justice, particularly in the context of digital financial technologies and their impact on communities and creation. The discussions centred on wealth, greed, inequality, and the broader ethical implications of decentralised economic systems such as cryptocurrency.

The three-day event brought together voices from diverse faith traditions, offering a unique opportunity to engage in theological reflection on some of the most pressing economic challenges facing the world today. Conversations focused on how money—whether in traditional forms or emerging digital currencies—affects both people’s lives and the planet.

Theological Reflections on Debt: Turn Debt into Hope consultation
The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), in partnership with the Council for World Mission (CWM), convened a pivotal Theological Consultation on Debt from 13–15 May 2025. Bringing together theologians, church leaders, economic justice advocates, and grassroots practitioners, the consultation culminated in a robust communique now available on the WCRC website.

This timely gathering responded to the stark reality that global public debt has surpassed $100 trillion, disproportionately impacting the Global South. The communique denounces debt as a modern mechanism of economic and climate injustice—a continuation of colonial and neoliberal exploitation—that forces nations to choose between debt servicing and human dignity. The consultation affirms the Turn Debt into Hope campaign, urging churches worldwide to mobilise their members in advocacy and petition for:

- Total cancellation of unjust and unsustainable debts,
- A reformed global financial architecture rooted in justice,
- Climate reparations and the end of extractive, debt-based recovery models.

Ecological Justice – Decade for Climate Justice

At the 2022 Executive Committee, an urgent plea was made to declare a decade for climate justice. A core group was put into place, and work on the climate justice initiative began immediately.

According to the plan, every year has a series of activities planned. This included a Lenten Campaign for climate justice in 2022, in which reflections on climate and climate action, along with liturgies, were uploaded to our website for churches to use.

A significant event was planned in October 2023 in Indonesia. The objective of the event was to produce a document on Faith, Economy and Ecology. This document has been used as a background document for both our Economic Justice and our Ecological Justice work.

Gender Justice

Gender Policy

In line with the action of the Leipzig General Council calling for a Gender Policy to be put into place by 2019. The Justice desk presented a policy to the Executive Committee in 2019 for consideration. This was returned asking for a few corrections to be made to this draft. A second draft was presented in 2020 and this was accepted by the Executive Committee.

Gender Audit 2024

The Gender Audit 2024 enabled us to uncover the status of women within our member churches. Since March 2024, we have invited member churches to participate in the survey through questionnaires. The survey consisted of 20 questions, with an additional seven required only for churches that do not ordain women. To ensure accessibility, the Survey Monkey platform was made available in five languages: English, Spanish, Indonesian, Polish, and French.

The primary goal of this Gender Audit is to ensure that both men and women are fully engaged in God's ministry within the church and society. A particular focus was placed on addressing the challenges associated with the ordination of women in member churches. The audit, launched in December 2022, sought to achieve three objectives as outlined in the ExCom 2023 and CGS report: to illuminate what churches are saying about women, to ascertain the status of women in leadership positions, and to discover the aspirations of women in the churches.

By March 25, 2025, responses had been collected from 159 out of 222 member churches, representing approximately 71.6% of the communion. Findings revealed that 11.95% of churches (19 churches) do not practice the ordination of women as ministers of Word and Sacrament, and 75% of churches have not yet developed a plan for women's ordination. Within the communion, 32% of ordained pastors are women. Additionally, 34.68% of churches have implemented a quota system to promote gender balance in organisational processes. However, 40.16% of churches still have not had women occupy senior leadership roles such as general secretary, moderator, or president. The average proportion of women representatives in

general assemblies was 38%, while 50.37% of churches reported having no gender justice policy.

Through open-ended survey responses, some churches indicated inclusivity toward all genders, yet also pointed out that the survey's definition of gender was limited to a binary framework. Barriers to women's service in ministry were largely described as cultural and rooted in patriarchy. Church ministry continues to be predominantly male-dominated, where women often face discrimination, rejection, and perceptions of being unsuitable for leadership roles. Women remain subject to sexualized portrayals, and their involvement in progressive ministry is frequently regarded as extraordinary rather than normative.

The evaluation of this process revealed that a significant amount of energy is required to engage church leadership and encourage participation in the survey. Moving forward, the next steps include conducting deeper data analysis through both quantitative and qualitative research, creating a final report for presentation to the Women's Caucus group at the General Council, and maintaining contact with churches that have not yet responded to the survey.

Finally, the strategic assessment highlights that conducting a comprehensive census of all churches requires considerable time and resources. To address this, future surveys could consider sampling methods. By bringing sample sizes closer to census levels, the process could reduce sampling errors while still producing reliable results.

Regional Consultation on Gender Leadership

From 8–11 July in Lusaka, Zambia, 22 participants from across Africa—including Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Congo, and Cameroon—gathered at St. Paul's Women's Centre of the United Church of Zambia. The consultation was held under the theme *"Envisioning Life-nurturing Leadership in the Context of Africa."*

The keynote address was delivered by Rev. Reose Malowa, the first ordained woman in the Reformed Church in Zambia. She emphasized the importance of life-nurturing leadership in the African context, stressing that women's ordination is not simply a demand for representation, but a call to recognize the inherent worth and capabilities of women as spiritual leaders, agents of change, and catalysts for societal transformation. Thematic addresses were presented by Rev. Pauline and

Prof. Simbarashe, who explored sub-themes on the importance of women's ordination and how churches might engage with it.

Most sessions centered on group discussions responding to the presentations. These were divided into three groups, with each group contributing to the formulation of a statement and providing data for the 2024 Gender Audit. In addition to these discussions, participants also engaged in worship and devotions, cultural exchanges, and excursions. The opening worship featured songs in diverse African languages, with Ms. Amritha leading a devotion on women's agency. The closing worship included Holy Communion. A cultural night celebrated African diversity through traditional dress, music, and food. Deaconess Mable Sichali led participants on a visit to the synod office, highlighting UCZ's social justice work with the WCF.

Welcoming addresses were delivered by Rev. Musaba, General Secretary of the UCZ, and Rev. Lydia Newsange, President of the AACC, while Ms. Veronica, an ExCom member of WCRC, brought greetings from the WCRC. Contributions from UCZ and WCF included vehicles and dinner for the cultural night. A listing group composed of Lilian, Paulina, Samkeliso, and Musaba was formed to collect discussion notes and draft a final statement. Notably, church leaders from Malawi and Nigeria—where women are not ordained—participated in the consultation, creating space for dialogue on the challenges and possibilities of ordaining women in their contexts.

The consultation sought to achieve three key goals: theological and women's reflection on life-nurturing leadership; shaping women's leadership in the African context; and developing an action plan to address women's ordination as life-nurturing leadership. These goals were explored through three sub-themes: the importance of women's ordination and ministry in Africa; envisioning women's leadership; and reforming and transforming the church toward life-nurturing leadership.

The outcomes included the development of a communiqué on life-nurturing gender leadership in Africa, the collection of data for the Gender Audit 2024, and the empowerment of women within UCZ-WCF to challenge the male dominance of church ministry. WCF also initiated a program on women and the Bible (CBS). Additionally, the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (Nkhoma Synod) in Malawi is in the process of adopting a constitution to allow the ordination of women.

Evaluations showed that participants greatly valued the cultural night as an opportunity to share and celebrate diversity. While there were minor complaints about the venue and food, participants expressed commitment to collaborate as a

team to advance women's ministry in Africa. ACRC's role in mobilizing participants was particularly appreciated.

Next steps include hosting an online meeting to follow up on the action plan and establishing networks to foster constructive dialogue around women's ordination. Strategically, the consultation highlighted both opportunities and challenges. UCZ headquarters was pleased to host, though some church leaders and members initially viewed WCRC with suspicion, assuming it to be an NGO and expressing concern that discussions on gender might undermine the church. This demonstrated the sensitivity surrounding gender justice within ecclesial contexts.

Nevertheless, the consultation created space for positive engagement. By partnering with regional bodies such as UCZ and WCF, WCRC was able to strengthen its mission and identity while advancing its broader initiative on gender justice in the Christian faith. The event affirmed the potential of collaboration to influence churches and grassroots members, making gender justice an integral part of Christian witness in Africa.

Gender and Militarisation Conference 2024 in Juba

From 24–28 September, twenty-five participants gathered in Juba, South Sudan, for the Gender and Militarisation Conference 2024. The consultation sought to encourage and empower churches and other relevant institutions to embrace God's transformative mission in solidarity against war and militarisation. Participants included representatives from CWM women delegates, feminist theologians, activists, staff from the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), and members of Women's Link, a community for peacebuilding.

The primary goal of the conference was to mobilize churches and institutions to stand against war and militarisation, with a strong emphasis on gender justice. Four key objectives shaped the consultation: first, to discern and articulate women's experiences of military violence in the context of militarisation; second, to uncover how patriarchal knowledge embedded within militarisation processes harms both people and natural resources; third, to provide theological perspectives that challenge capitalist patriarchy in relation to war and militarisation; and fourth, to encourage the creation of multitudes within church and society that can act in resistance and solidarity against military empires.

The conference outcomes were significant. Participants strengthened networks, particularly by highlighting and emphasizing the often invisible role of women's faith through Women's Link within the SSCC. A communiqué entitled *"Bleeding Women and a Bleeding World: Empowering Faith in a Militarised Context"* was issued, calling on churches to take a firm stand against militarisation and war. Furthermore, plans were made for a publication arising from the conference, aimed at amplifying these theological, social, and gendered perspectives.

Participant evaluations reflected deep gratitude for the unique opportunity to engage in this consultation. Many emphasized how it broadened their research and understanding of global militarisation while offering rare and meaningful encounters with women who shared diverse stories of resistance. The conference challenged common geopolitical assumptions and fostered rich discussions around feminist and eco-theological perspectives, as well as biblical hermeneutics in relation to militarisation.

Racism, Authoritarianism and Nationalism

A consultation bringing together Dalit and Theologians of African descent was conducted in November/December 2018. This consultation was held in two parts, the first was an exposure to Dalit realities in India and the second was an academic consultation that reflected on the experiences of Dalit and Black theologians. The consultation was able to flesh out the multiple levels of connectivity between these two groups and sought to find strategic means in which these could be addressed.

Empires and Genocide

A consultation held between the 20th and 24th of August 2024 called for the churches to recognize and take a concrete stand against genocide. Jointly organized by the All African Conference of Churches, the Council for World Mission and the World Communion of Reformed Churches and locally hosted by the Council of Churches in Namibia in Windhoek, Namibia, the consultation sought to ask what role have the church and ecumenical partners played, and can continue to play, in finding justice for the crucified peoples in post-genocide settings?

The consultation was intentionally held in Namibia which was the location of the first genocide of the 20th century. Starting in 1904 the Herero and Nama people were ordered to be massacred by the German colonial power. The struggle for acknowledgement and apology still continues today. The consultation was essential in the light of the on-going genocide in Palestine.

Bringing together church and ecumenical leaders, traditional authorities, activists, engaged academics but most importantly those who have suffered the injustices of genocide the consultation specifically sought to address the issue from the perspective of those who are being crucified. This intentionality of approach from below allowed those gathered to name Genocide as being part of the mechanics of the necropolitics of Empire.

In its communique the consultation stated, "The conference witnessed the resistance of the crucified, the impoverished, women, young people and children in their steadfast refusal to be erased and annihilated. Our statement arises from the cry of the earth's people against the geopolitics of empire, the way empire continues to unleash a "necropolitics" (i.e. a politics, practice and even celebration of death)"

The consultation made strong connections between genocide in the modern period and the legacy of colonialism, in his keynote address, the Namibian scholar and activist Paul Isaak made the point that "From the perspective of the colonized, mission and colonialism was dominated by missionaries, traders, settlers and soldiers or what is known as the three Cs: Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization. These three Cs imposed upon Africans a particular way of being."

At the time of writing this a second follow up consultation is being planned in Turkey between the 24th and the 28th of August 2025.

P3: Doing Theology for Transformation

Introduction

"The Theology Concept Paper for the 27th General Council in Chiang Mai calls for a theology of perseverance at a time when established ideas and strategies are questioned, the communicability of the language of the church can no longer be taken for granted, and the faith of the people needs nurturing and support:

Living in a scandalous world that is marked by wars and conflict has sensitized us once again that vulnerability is not just a characteristic of people in precarious situations but a basic signature of human existence.

Theologies of perseverance respond to these experiences. Perseverance is a practice of faith in situations of distress. Perseverance distinguishes between progress and hope, building on often neglected spiritual resources. Perseverance transforms communities into caring bodies of mutual encouragement. Perseverance acknowledges trauma but also recognizes promise wherever there is a chance for life-enhancing engagement. Perseverance in witness lives out the mission from the margins. It does not originate from positions of power and influence but from the persistent engagement of local communities."

This emphasis emerged in the theological work of the WCRC during the COVID-19 pandemic and in response to the backlash against progressive agendas in many parts of the world.

In the following, we share some significant activities of the WCRC's theological work from the last eight years

Theological Education Conference (2018-2022)

The idea of a theological education conference emerged at the World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania, in 2018 when representatives of the WCRC, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany started a conversation on how the three organizations could partner to support theological schools in their constituencies. The World Council of Churches joined at a later stage.

The most significant fruit of this discussion was the conference "Pandemic and Pedagogy: Ecumenical Consultation on Theological Education" at the Trinity

Theological Seminary in Accra, Ghana, in 2022. The conference was held in a hybrid format. 81 theological educators from all parts of the world participated locally and online.

The conference looked at how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected theological education and used the caesura of the pandemic to take stock of online education and explore how the learnings from online education could be utilized for the development of pedagogy.

The conference explored the following areas:

- educational methods related to pandemic traumata
    - impact of stress/isolation on the quality of life and learning for staff and students
    - providing curricular spaces for sharing the strains and strategies for healing and resilience
- how networks of theological institutions and ecumenical cooperation can shape the content and methods of theological discourse in digital space
    - possibilities for new forms of online ecumenism that include digital pilgrimages, and webinars that broaden the experience of global fellowship and spirituality
    - reconceptualizing the scope, reach, and aims of formal and informal theological education as a question of equity
- pedagogical promise in the wake of the pandemic
    - networking for online access to teaching material and new ways to share resources for educational support
    - new avenues for transformative pedagogies and methods of decolonizing digital based theological education
    - case studies of online pedagogical lessons learned by those who previously hosted online teaching and those who transitioned to online theological education

The conference adopted a communique that summarized key features of an ecumenical education:

Trans-contextual insights

> [...] The pandemic has shaken certain privileges. Global experiences of (temporary) disablement, confinement, isolation, insecurity, and vulner-

ability have proliferated. These experiences have led to a loss of white, male, colonial, able-bodied naivete and point all of us to the insights and resources of communities who have long grappled with and survived such conditions. While some have hoped that such shared experiences might lead to new forms of solidarity, we recognize that they can just as easily lead to doubling down on entitlement and to the reification of hierarchies and power structures due to perceived and real threats.

The pandemic has served as a catalyst in the crisis of resident seminary education that has long been building up globally. It has also revealed many of the hidden costs of residential education for individuals, families, and communities. While academic formation can be translated into new media with more ease than spiritual and ministerial formation, we are not merely challenged to translate established models of learning, spiritual and ministerial formation into new formats. Between "form follows function," and "the medium is the message," we are reminded that pedagogy, design, and technology are never neutral. We are challenged to rethink what theological education is about, for whom it is, to which ends, and what it requires. [...]

Theological insights

Technology is part of creation, with its blessings and its curses. Theological education has always used a variety of tools, practices, and media for its intents and purposes. Just like residential learning, online learning has to critically ask the questions, for what and for whom is theological education? Who is able to access our spaces? Who is invisibilized by their shape? Who sets the agenda? Who is absent, left behind, or excluded? Online learning poses distinct challenges for infrastructurally disadvantaged, tech-poor, and less literate communities, and it calls us to reflect what responsible modes of stewardship and intercession look like.

Ecclesial communities, whether local or ecumenical, have always been partially "virtual" and remote: their visible and invisible unity constituted of bodies not all of which are ever physically co-present because they are ill, disabled, elderly, young, immobile, spread out geographically, or bound by other responsibilities. Theological education, too, has always been partially "virtual" and remote: interacting with interlocutors that are only

present on parchment, paper, or screens, keeping conversation not only with those physically distant, but also with those long temporally departed. The disruption and intensification of relationships that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about challenges us to re-ground our understanding of theological education in ecclesiology. [...]

As communities of faith, we thus recognize that degrees of presence and absence are indelible markers of the incarnational reality of the body of Christ, and have in all times been mediated differently. Online media poses distinct technological, infrastructural, economic, pedagogical and cultural challenges, but it is just another modality that attends all embodied, incarnated, social, translocal, transtemporal, and spiritual communion. The Covid-19 pandemic challenges us to reground our understanding of theological education in liturgical and eucharistic theology.

Online spaces are also "spaces" which come with their own structures of access and visitability. We are challenged to recognize them, too, as "holy ground" of encounter with God and one another. A theology of hospitality can remind us of the need to make space for one another and for God's presence among us in whichever medium, and of the porous and temporary nature of the roles of host and visitor, instructor and learner. It can ground us in a eucharistic and liturgical theology as it draws our attention back to Christ as the host and the bread of theological education in whichever space. It encourages us to recognize that just like in other liturgical spaces, our transitory attendance of online and offline spaces of theological education is also to edify and commission, nourish, and send us into the world. [...]

Pedagogical insights

Scrambling to adjust to the disruption of theological education due to the pandemic has revealed that our inherited models of education pay relatively little attention to the formation of academics as teachers and pedagogues. For pedagogy to be transformative, we not only have to transform our pedagogy, we also have to educate educators and capacitate institutions for empowering, expansive, and liberative pedagogies.

In and through the theological frameworks explored, the multiple pandemics of our time encourage us to learn from the ecumenical experience

of decentralized membership in the communion of saints, from diasporic experiences of dislocation, from contextual experiences of embodied and communal cognition. It directs us to the particular expertise which disabled and neuro-diverse communities, as well as indigenous and communal pedagogies have to offer. [...]

Just like residential learning, online learning has to balance privacy and safety that allow for vulnerability, transformation, and growth on the one hand, and publicness that allow for critical engagement, witness, and impact on the other hand. Online learning poses distinct challenges with regard to the transformation of people's homes into teaching spaces as well as different levels of vulnerability to surveillance and discipline in different contexts. It also has the promise of bringing the richness and challenges of the students' contexts into our classroom spaces in unprecedented ways, open space for emotional intimacy and care. [...]

All learning comes with equalizing effects *and* with structures of authority. All learning requires the intentional cultivation of pedagogies to counter and undo power structures. Theological education online is called to recognize students as subjects rather than objects of learning, collaborate with them on curriculum and assessment design, and to diversify our pedagogies. We embrace and celebrate the democratizing, participatory, inclusive and collaborative potentials of digital technologies. We also recognize the need to attend to new hierarchies they create, the need to attend to differential burdens of precarity, risk, and vulnerability as they affect students, faculty, and institutions, and the need to cultivate digital literacy and best practices across generations and cultures. [...]

Grateful that the body of Christ can be mediated in a variety of ways, and invested in its ever greater unity, we will continue to work toward theological education that is equitable, sustainable, nourishing, and transformative as it is oriented by God's incarnated presence among us, within us, and beyond us.

Freedom of Religion and Belief (2020-2023)

From 2023 to 2024, the WCRC engaged in an intensive process to come to terms with the challenges posed by the Freedom of Religion and Belief (FORB) framework that is based on Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

The WCRC's engagement began with a consultation in Frankfurt, which explored the complexity of religious rights. The participants observed that the FORB are an essential instrument to protect vulnerable communities, but also marked that these rights can also be used to serve powerful cultural or even racist agendas. The consultation, therefore, proposed a framework that should guide the WCRC's position.

> A framework of engagement must be grounded in the experiences of the vulnerable and marginalized, those whose religious rights and identities have been violated and persecuted. Noting that in the context of religious violence, religion often serves as an identity marker that serves as a rallying point for underlying economic and material interests. We were further aware that religion is only one of the many identities because, as humans, we bear multiple identities which intersect with each other, and as such can make us more vulnerable to systems of oppression – namely ethnicity, gender, caste, class, and sexuality. Indeed, it is also often the case that several of us carry even more than a singular religious identity, either by practice or by family relationships. Often what is named as religious violence in actuality involves though does not invoke these other identities as well. We therefore recognize that in the context of polarization and religious nationalism, those most vulnerable to violence are those who are 'othered' and reduced to singular identities.

This discussion was followed up by a joint project with the Lutheran World Federation as one of the initiatives to live out the Wittenberg Witness, in which the WCRC and LWF committed to searching for new imagination to live out the unity that the

two traditions already had. The two communions convened a Conference in Haus Villigst in 2023.

The conference explored theological and contextual challenges and committed to action points that the two communions would pursue. [...]

The Tenuous relation of the Reformation to the FORB

> We acknowledged that this contemporary history of upholding FORB has a tenuous relationship to the Reformation. While ideas that we now understand as part of FORB have roots in the Reformation and were developed by Enlightenment thinking, the concepts of religious freedom were not yet fully formulated in 16th-century Europe and, in several instances, were violated by the reformers. Examples include Luther's anti-Jewish writings and teachings and the Lutheran persecution of the Anabaptists, both of which have been repudiated in recent decades, or Calvin's involvement in the execution of Michael Servetus. We acknowledged, nevertheless, that even at that time, there were voices such as French Reformed theologian Sebastian Castellio's that called for religious tolerance and reminded us that there can be no union between Gospel and political power, particularly power enmeshed with violence. [...]

The accountability of nation states

> We agreed that, in every context, the church's task concerning FORB is to hold the state accountable so that religious freedoms are neither denied nor guaranteed to only a few. This should be done so that public interests and religious accommodations can coexist with the least harm possible. The church does so by drawing upon its public, prophetic, and political theologies, which prioritise the concerns of the most vulnerable based on the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ and its conviction that all people are loved by God and are entitled to freedom of religion or belief.

Nationalism and imperialism

> We noted that various forms of nationalism, including Christian nationalism, repress FORB in many countries today. In alarming ways, this threat to FORB is growing rapidly. In societies experiencing dramatic demographic change through immigration or other causes, groups losing their historic

dominance seek the protection of their ethnic and religious identity by merging it with nationalistic loyalty and alleging they are threatened or even attacked. Manipulating social anxieties and fears, they seek to regain political power through authoritarian means. When successful, such regimes foster a religiously exclusivist, nationalistic vision that undermines the identities of those of other religious faiths, ethnic backgrounds, and social practices, leaving commitments to FORB in disarray. [...]

Interrelations between human rights

We acknowledged that human rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, but they cannot be absolutely applied in a way that harms the human rights of the other. Therefore, human rights have limitations provided by law to protect fundamental rights and the freedoms of others. Human rights serve to protect human dignity and are measured by whether they are respected and protected or not. Thus, invoking religious freedom for some should not result in the oppression of others. In that case, FoRB ceases to serve its protective purpose. As the Apostle Paul reminds us: "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:13-14, referencing Matthew 22:39). [...]

Acting together

We identified key theological questions that undergird our action on FORB within each communion, and together as the LWF and WCRC.

a) What is the socio-political and economic context in which religions and, in particular, the Christian Church exist today, and what are the interconnections between these?
b) How do we consider the relationships that shape the heart of our calling?
c) How do the cross and the resurrection frame our understanding of FORB?
d) How can we address the tension between rights and beliefs that may contradict these rights?

We recommend:

a) The continued study of FORB.
b) Continued consultation toward strengthening cooperation on FORB between the LWF and WCRC.
c) Continued cooperation in advocacy on FORB between the LWF and WCRC in the context of our work and witness at the UN.
d) Continued work, whenever possible, with ecumenical and interfaith partners who share our commitments to approaching FORB within a justice framework

The Nicaea Project (2024-2025)

The 1700th anniversary of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, which formulated the theological concepts to describe the divinity of Christ, sparked a remarkable momentum in the ecumenical movement. Almost all Christian churches relate to the Nicene Creed in one way or another. For some, it is an established element in the liturgy, others use it only sporadically. Many Reformed churches have adopted it in their books of orders, others see themselves as non-creedal and use the creedal tradition more loosely as a reference that marks parameters of their faith.

Reformed churches have a distinct tradition of receiving creeds and confessions. We do not value them as texts from the past, but for their significance for the faith in the present. From this perspective, the commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea presents an opportunity to re-connect with the belief in the triune God and re-examine the faithfulness of the covenant community of the Church. Reformed churches celebrate the Nicene faith. But at the same time, Reformed hermeneutics approaches such commemorations as moments to re-discern its faith, theology, self-understanding, and mission with a simple but profound two-pronged test:

1. Can the Creed and the tradition evolving from it still be seen as adhering to the Self-Revelation of God, as discerned, as it is confessed and witnessed in the Scripture?
2. Is the language of the Creed still adequate to express the continued Self-Revelation of God encountered in the historical as well as the contemporary context?

This test builds upon John Calvin's advice for the reception of creeds, which he developed in the fourth book of his Institutes:

> "Whenever the decree of a council is produced, the first thing I would wish to be done is to examine at what time it was held, on what occasion, with what intention, and who were present at it; next, I would bring the subject discussed to the standard of Scripture. And this I would do in such a way that the decision of the council should have its weight and be regarded in the light of a prior judgment, yet not to prevent the application of the test which I have mentioned." (Institutes IV, 9, 8)

When the Strategic Plan Programme Group in 2024 discussed the Reformed contribution to the Nicaea anniversary, the idea was born to publish an edited volume, which follows Calvin's advice and presents voices from all areas of the Reformed spectrum that demonstrate the relevance of the Nicene Creed and the creedal tradition for Reformed faith today. While the book project should emphasize a distinctly Reformed approach, it should not become a confessional project. To be Reformed means to be ecumenical. We, therefore, opened the project for theologians from other Christian communions and tried to shape a voice that would be an inspiration for Christians from many Christian traditions.

The project quickly developed a remarkable momentum. We found people who offered to serve as editors and authors. Format and approach of the book were developed in a participatory process, which involved a continuous conversation among the editors, an elaborate peer review process of all articles, and accompaniment of authors along the way.

The book cover summarizes the content of the book as follows:

> The 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea is an invitation to both re-encounter the triune God and re-examine the covenantal faithfulness of the Church in a wounded and waiting world. Reformed churches celebrate the Nicene faith – but not uncritically. Receiving is not passive acceptance, but radical engagement. For the Reformed tradition, the anniversary is a call to interrogate, discern, and renew the very grammar of our faith. Reformed hermeneutics receives such anniversaries not as closures of doctrinal certainty, but as openings where theology can be re-tested in the fire of Scripture, re-voiced in the cries of the wounded, and reshaped in the pulse of mission.

The book has the title "Receiving Nicaea Today: Global Voices from Reformed Perspectives". The Volume has six sections that take up the critical tradition of receiving creeds and confessions from perspectives that are relevant for the life of the church today:

- Reformed Hermeneutics and the Authority of Creeds
- Nicaea and the Empire
- Scriptural and Theological Hermeneutics of the Nicene Faith
- Nicene Influence on Reformed Synodality and Church Governance
- Confessions and Contemporary Witness
- From Creed to Confessing: Worship, Teaching, and Mission

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is blessed by this theological network and proud of the results of this work.

We thank the group of editors, comprising Anna Case-Winters, Margit Ernst-Habib, Gemma King, Henry Kuo, Rathnakara Sadananda, and Dirk J. Smit, for developing the idea of a living reception of the Nicene faith and offering their global networks for the search for potential authors and accompanying authors in the different sections of the book.

The WCRC is deeply grateful for the enthusiastic support that the project received from the 36 authors who offered 34 individual and co-authored articles. Almost everyone whom we approached committed immediately. The different perspectives that the authors provided improved the project considerably. We are grateful that half of the authors are from the Global South and express our appreciation for the commitment of all the contributors to decolonialize theology. It is because of this commitment that the book can present a global reception of the Nicene tradition.

The volume is available digitally free of charge and can be downloaded from the WCRC website.

The book wants to be a contribution to the development of Reformed theology across the globe. The articles in the book are directed at interested readers, lay and ordained, with a basic understanding of the Creed, who want to gain a deeper understanding of its significance for the life of the Church today.

The Global Institute of Theology (2020-2023)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Global Institute of Theology (GIT) had to be postponed several times. In 2020, we wanted to meet at the Union Theological College in Dasmariñas, Philippines. After this proved to be impossible, we planned for a GIT in 2021 at the Jakarta School of Theological Philosophy in Indonesia. But it was only in 2023 that we could meet at the Pacific Theological College (PTC) in Suva, Fiji.

Most of the students who were selected in 2020 were journeying with us. They participated in an essay competition and prepared one session in the COVID-19 and Beyond programme. When the 27 students finally met in Suva, Fiji, they had all grown older. Several of the students were already working as pastors. This offered the opportunity to discuss how theological insights could be translated in the service of the church.

This particular emphasis became even more present because the 2023 GIT had a practical theology focus and concentrated on preaching. One significant part of the programme was the preaching clinic, in which we discussed the sermons of all the students.

The Theme: "Unsettling the Word in an Unsettled World"

The letter of invitation expanded the motivation of the theme:

Several conflicts of the 21st century have a religious dimension. In many parts of the world, we see the rise of authoritarianism. Sacred resources have been politicised and are exploited to justify exclusion and violence. None of the major world religions seems to be immune to this trend. Politicised religion invigorates traditional power structures and legitimises the oppression of women and vulnerable minorities. Religion is used to constitute borders that are insurmountable for everyone who is constructed as the racial, ethnic, cultural or moral Other.

The theme "Unsettling the Word" explores the potential of the Christian tradition to unsettle these power structures. In many of these conflicts, people find inspiration in the Biblical witness that "God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged" (Confession of Belhar). The history of the church is full of examples where the belief in the God of justice assured the excluded and exploited of their capability to resist structures

of oppression. In these situations, the Christian faith is showing its unsettling potential. Theology provides the language for the re-location from the centres of power to the margins. It comforts and assures the marginalised, provides the tools for a radical critique of power, and gives a vision of a life in fullness (Jn. 10:10) that overcomes exclusion, exploitation, and violence.

Faculty and Courses Offered

Dean of the Program: Rev. Dr HyeRan Kim Cragg
Dean of the Students: Ms Mary Chang
Chaplain: Rev. Nikotemo Sopepa
Faculty

- HyeRan Kim Cragg (Core Course): Earth-Bound Preaching amidst an unsettling climate crises
- Revelation Velunta (Core Course): Parables as Unsettling Texts
- Stephen Burns (Core Course): Worship as Unsettling Practice
- Hanns Lessing and Philip Peacock (Core Course): Discernment amidst an unsettled world
- Jerusha Neal (Optional): Preaching for Unsettling Times
- Nontando Hadebe (Optional): Womanist Preaching to unsettle oppressions
- Afereti Uili (Optional): Prophetic Language as Unsettling Speech
- Faafetai Aiava (Optional): Doing theology to unsettle centres

Experiences

HyeRan Kim-Cragg, the Academic Deane of the programme, described her experience:

> Every GIT is special, but this one was particularly so because for the first time in the history of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the GIT took place in the Pacific Region. I want to acknowledge the warm hospitality of Pacific Theological College and its community members.
>
> This GIT was also unique because each student was given the chance to

> preach a sermon in front of their colleagues over the course of our time together. The preaching took place in the chapel which was built to reflect the Pacifika world view of circular interconnectedness. Touched by this spirit, our so-called "Preaching Clinic" was conducted in a communally supportive way to mutually empower and inspire one another's vocational identity as preachers. You will notice that all the sermons printed here are deeply personal and deeply political. [...]
>
> For example, gender-based violence issues, drawing from such stories as that of Hagar, Bathsheba, Tamar, and Queen Vashti form an important cluster. The Climate Crisis was also often raised in relation to lived contexts of destructive mining practices and ecological injustice. Attention was also paid to the small animals in the Bible. AIDS, Covid 19, LGBTQ issues, and polarization in the political climate were addressed. Theological themes of fellowship, friendship, faith in God despite and because of the uncertainty we all face, salvation, Sabbath, discipleship and Imago Dei, are also featured.

Sermons delivered during the GIT have been published under the title "Sermons for an Unsettled World" and are available on the WCRC website.[7]

Pauline Patricia from Indonesia talked about her experience at the GIT in an interview with WCRC communications:[8]

> Returning home with these insights, Pauline encountered a new challenge as she continued her role as a vicar in a large city congregation in Indonesia. Her GIT training had given her a sense of responsibility to introduce the "disruptive" and reformative ideas she had learned. But bridging this gap between knowledge and practice in her settled, comfortable congregation has required a careful balance of respect for established customs and a courage to ask the hard questions. For Pauline, this tension is a call to remain an agent of transformation. Her time at GIT, she feels, has equipped her with both the confidence and the tools necessary to start this dialogue and pursue meaningful changes in her congregation.
>
> One of her most powerful memories from GIT came in the form of a morn-

7 See: [https://wcrc.eu/resource/sermons-for-an-unsettled-world/].
8 See: [https://wcrc.eu/bridging-knowledge-and-practice-an-interview-with-pauline-patricia-on-the-global-institute-of-theology-git/].

> ing worship service she helped prepare with the other participants. The service included a song in sign language—a move intended not only as an act of inclusion but also as a challenge to rethink the accessibility of worship. Using sign language, Pauline explained, was a way of acknowledging the unique challenges of the deaf community and disrupting the usual flow of worship for the hearing participants. Her goal was to raise awareness about the importance of accessibility in ministry and to invite others into a space of empathy for marginalized groups. It was an unforgettable experience that reinforced her desire to advocate for inclusivity within her own ministry.
>
> For those considering the GIT program, Pauline has a straightforward message: "Be a theologian who is unsettled and unsettling." She encourages future participants to see GIT as a space to deepen their commitment to justice and transformation. The program, she says, is an unparalleled opportunity to challenge norms and build relationships with people from around the world, strengthening both one's theology and sense of empathy for social and ecological issues.

David Brandon Smith also reflected his experiences in an interview with WCRC communications:[9]

> One of the key takeaways from Smith's GIT experience was not just the theological knowledge gained, but the invaluable "soft skills" he developed through dialogue and engagement with peers from diverse backgrounds. Known for his blunt communication style, honed in the direct environment of German academia, Smith quickly realized that ecumenical dialogue required a different approach—one that emphasized listening, patience, and humility. The GIT's structure fostered these skills, creating a space for meaningful conversation, even in the face of disagreement. This, he notes, is crucial for the future of ecumenism, where dialogue often occurs across vast theological and cultural divides.
>
> The GIT program, according to Smith, is intentionally designed to encourage participants to expand their horizons. Whether through carefully

[9] [https://wcrc.eu/how-a-summer-at-the-git-redefined-david-brandon-smiths-ministry-and-academic-career/].

crafted group assignments, ecumenical excursions, or informal conversations between events, every aspect of the program contributes to personal and spiritual growth. Smith reflects that these moments of connection—often seemingly accidental—were pivotal in shaping his perspective and approach to ministry. "It's these formative experiences that stay with you," he explains.

For those considering the GIT program, Smith has a clear message: "DO IT!" He acknowledges that, while there are many ecumenical programs out there, the GIT stands out for its ability to combine rigorous theological engagement with personal and spiritual transformation. Whether participants choose to pursue careers in ecumenism, academia, or pastoral ministry, the program offers a unique opportunity to learn, grow, and build lasting connections.

The Reformed World

The Self-Understanding of the Reformed World

In 2019, a new editorial board of the Reformed World was appointed. The following persons serve on the board: Anna Case-Winters, Dirke Smit, Heleen Zorgdrager, HyeRan Kim-Cragg, J.O.Y Mante, Joseop Keum, Margit Ernst-Habib, Munther Isaac, Nadia Maris, Rathnakara Sadananda, Reinerio Arce Valentin, Yvette Bloomfield. Heleen Zorgdrager was appointed the convener of the board.

The board re-visited the self-understanding and the structures of the Reformed World and adopted the following terms of reference:

Aim and Scope of the Reformed World

> The *Reformed World* is an international journal that provides a forum for sharing and debating theological studies and prophetic witness that seek to engage and transform the realities of our time. The journal draws on, widens and deepens the treasures of Reformed sources, past and present. Reformed World purposefully and joyfully embodies a diversity of voices and contextual perspectives, inspired by ecclesial, academic and grass roots communities. In the understanding of Reformed World, theological

studies include the biblical, historical, systematic, and practical, as well as reflections on visual art, music, poetry, and other expressions of the human mind and soul that aim at the transformation of the world.

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

Structures

The Roles of WCRC Executives in the *Reformed World*:

- According to Art 5 of the Bylaws of the Constitution all WCRC publications (excluding those from Regional Councils) are under the supervision of the *General Secretary*. The General Secretary is therefore an *ex officio* member of the Editorial Board.
- The *Executive Secretary for Communion and Theology* serves as the *Editor* of the *Reformed World*. In this capacity the *Executive Secretary for Communion and Theology* is an *ex officio* member of the Editorial Board.
- The *Executive Secretary for Communications and Operations* serves as the *Managing Editor* of the *Reformed World* and has a role as advisor and resource person in the Editorial Board.

The Mandate of the Editorial Board:

The *Editorial Board* is responsible for the quality of the contents of *Reformed World* and its publication on a regular basis, twice a year.

The *Editorial Board* pursues its task in accord with the Aim and Scope of *Reformed World*, supporting the objectives of the work of the WCRC as, for example, described in the WCRC Strategic Plan.

The *Editorial Board* works independently within the mandate given and in continuous conversation with the SPPG.

Tasks

- To actively pursue, explore, and stimulate topics for theological reflection that are important for WCRC to hear, see, address, be challenged with and consider.

- To advise on direction for the journal, giving feedback on past issues and making suggestions for both subject matter and potential authors.
- To identify topics for commissions and special editions.
- To approach potential contributors.
- To take part in smaller editorial teams responsible for thematic issues.
- To provide content by writing occasional editorials and other articles.
- To conduct peer reviews if needed; also help to identify peer reviewers and provide second opinions on papers (i.e. where there is a conflict between reviewers).
- To commend the journal to authors, readers, and subscribers and encourage colleagues to submit their best work.

Reformed World Issues

The publishing schedule of the *Reformed World* has been delayed by the increased workload in the General Secretariat due to the demands during the COVID-19 pandemic and the period when the Executive Secretaries were taking up the duties of the General Secretary.

The following issues have been published:

- Volume 70, Numbers 1-2: Intersections of Church and Disability
- Volume 69, Number 2: A Tribute to Chris Ferguson
- Volume 69, Number 1: Ecumenical Dialogues
- Volume 68, Number 1: Lombard Prize Winning Essays
- Volume 67, Number 3: Global Institute of Theology
- Volume 67, Number 2: General Council Part 2
- Volume 67, Number 1: General Council Part 1

P4: Engaging God's Mission in Contexts of Crisis

Introduction

Mission is ideological: The living out of liberating discipleship leads to a renewal of language and praxis of mission that reforms the mission of the Communion and revitalizes the language and praxis of transformation that can be shared in partnerships with movements of resistance and change as they develop. (WCRC strategic plan 2018-2024)

The WCRC is called into God's holistic mission and commissioned to seek new ways of engaging in mission. As a communion, the WCRC strengthens doing mission in unity and stimulates reflections that make our churches' mission effective and relevant to the 21st century. The call to proclaim the saving grace and love of the triune God and to be God's agents of transformation in the world places mission at the heart of everything the WCRC and its member churches do. For the past 8 years, the WCRC have been guided by the Strategic plan to renewing a commitment to partnership in God's mission through worship, witness, diaconal service and to work for justice, so as to foster mission in unity, mission renewal, and mission empowerment.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches engages in advocacy work based on a faith commitment to the God of life has who brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. In a world of corruption, exploitation and greed, the confessions of Belhar (1986) and Accra (2004) declare that God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused (Belhar, Art. 4, Accra §24).

Seeing that people are denied their God-given right to live in dignity, both confessions call upon the churches "to stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged" (Belhar, Art 4). In the Accra Confession, churches have committed themselves to covenant in obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and accountable relationships (Accra, §37). This binds the Communion together to work for justice in the economy and the earth both in our shared global context and our various regional and local settings.

Advocacy work in the WCRC, having its roots in this tradition, encourages, accompanies and supports activities in the member churches to prepare the stage

for local people to become effective advocates of transformation towards justice and peace.

The WCRC is dedicated to

- *Encouraging* advocacy work where member churches face violence and injustice;
- *Accompanying* member churches in times of conflict;
- *Supporting* churches and WCRC regions to improve advocacy capacities.

Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement

Advocacy is woven into the very fabric of the WCRC's understanding of mission. The World Communion of Reformed Churches was called to strengthen the advocacy work of member churches and regions by creating the Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement (GRAPE).

Advocacy from Local to Global to Local (L2G2L)

In a globalized world, problems that require advocacy cannot be solved within the limits of the influence of local actors. Often even the national scene might not be sufficient to address the root causes of suffering and violence: Wars are often kindled by geopolitical tensions, poverty is caused by unfair trade regimes and the exploitation by transnational corporations, poor health systems result from neoliberal pressure to repay debts, and the climate crisis leads to the degradation of farmland. In all these instances, successful advocacy needs to address its issues on multiple levels – locally, nationally, regionally, and globally – to ultimately affect maximum and sustainable change at the local level.

The magnitude and intricacy of the inequitable economic system, coupled with the escalating climate breakdown, necessitate a paradigm shift. The GRAPE initiative endeavours to tackle the root causes of these challenges, leveraging the distinctive position of the church as a local force and a participant in regional and global communion.

The GRAPE Platforms aim at promoting, qualifying, supporting and accompanying the advocacy work of WCRC member churches and regions.

The strengthening of advocacy work should enable the churches to make a constructive contribution to conflict transformation. This work should benefit the population in conflict areas.

The African Communion of Reformed Churches has already initiated this process in two countries, Kenya and South Africa, in 2022.

The two countries decided to advocate and work on the following campaigns:

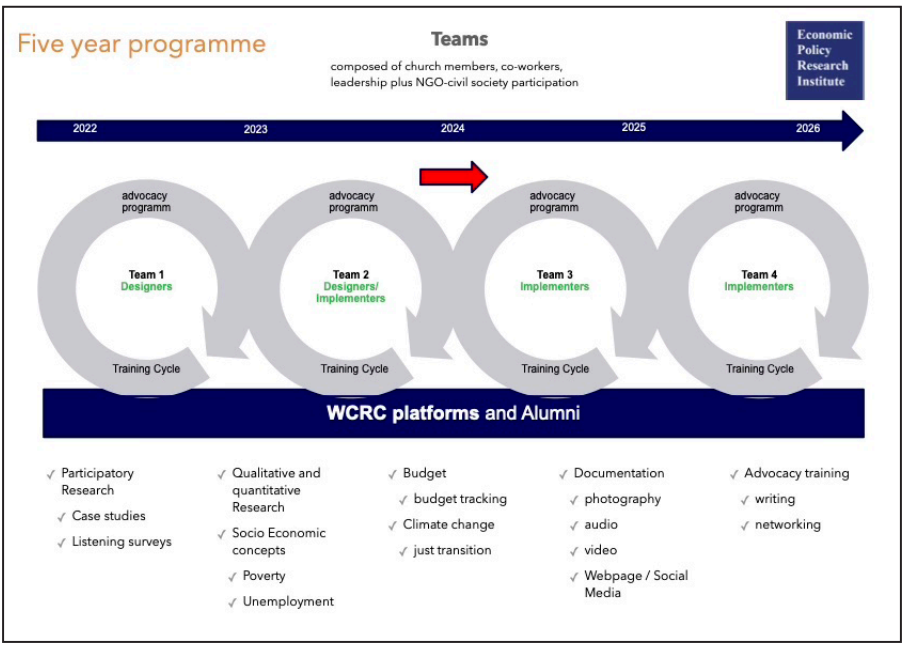
- Kenya: Addressing the impact of the climate crisis, the team aims to ensure that by 2028, every person in Kenya has access to 50 litres of clean drinking water or equivalent cash compensation. They advocate for global climate justice support for Kenya's efforts.
- South Africa: Tackling extreme income inequality and poverty, the team collaborates with national organizations for the introduction of a Universal Basic Income Grant (UBIG) of at least R 760 per person monthly to individuals aged 18 to 59 by 2028. The team leverages church infrastructure to disseminate campaign information in local languages, especially in rural areas.

Additionally, church leaders convene meetings with the teams in both South Africa and Kenya, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts in achieving the goals of the GRAPE campaign and programme. These interactions underscore the value of bringing together diverse stakeholders, including churches, civil society organizations, and global partners, to advance economic, social, and climate justice initiatives.

The GRAPE programme cooperates with the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) a leading implementor of international training programmes in this field. As a major contribution to the GRAPE programme, EPRI provides capacity training for local action teams to take up this role. The training aims to enable the churches to do research, analysis, advocacy and conflict resolution in their context and the region, thus fostering expertise for inclusive social and economic transformation and conflict resolution.

This involvement is based on participatory research and gathering sound evidence for the issues at hand. The current developmental debates and advocacy campaigns on the global level are more and more technical and often removed from the reality of the people. In this context, the churches need to have an in-depth sociological and economic understanding and conduct quality research

that enables them to use their advantage of being a 'people-centred organization' while constructively engaging with global players. This requires high level and longer-term capacity building within the churches to combine theological reflection, research and a professional understanding of the social and economic and political structures at play. The illustration shows the interdependency of training, agenda-setting and global network in this set-up.



Structure: Local People Setting the Advocacy Agenda

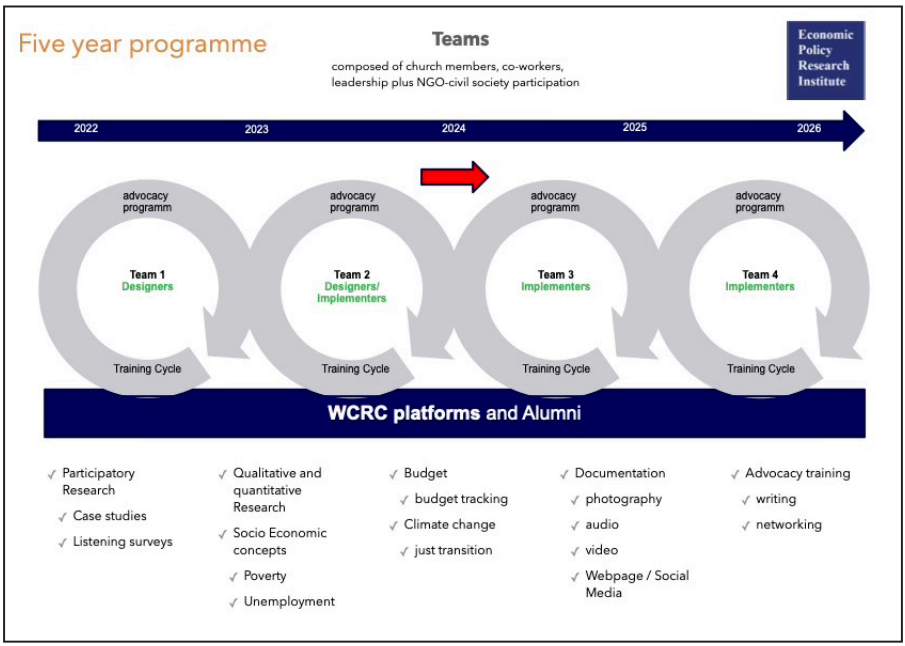
The Training Programme is five years that started in 2022 in pilot countries of South Africa and Kenya to design and implement one advocacy campaign programme. The focus lies on training, accompaniment, facilitation and empowerment to ensure local ownership from inception to completion.

In the first year of the training, a local team of five people per country took part in the training. The first team is called the designer team as they identify one pressing issue in their local context, which needs an advocacy campaign or conflict resolution efforts. During this designer phase, the first team analyses the problem, builds local evidence, identifies stakeholders and spheres of control, and sets outcomes, outputs, and activities to achieve their goals.

After twelve months, a new team was selected to receive training and was handed over the work from the previous group of trainees. For six months, the

teams worked together for a smooth hand-over. These circles of working together, handing over and taking over repeat every twelve months. In this way, five teams participate in the training programme, and they serve as a multiplier for the change programme. Teams three to five are implementors of the change programme. The local GRAPE platform oversees the five-year process to ensure ownership and continuity throughout the programme span.

The diagram explains this circle within the training programme and the roles of the teams as well as the content of the training. The example shows the social transformation module. A programme that addresses conflict resolution advocacy is under development. It will follow a similar methodology.



Throughout the training, design and implementation of the change programme, the local teams connect with the country platform and the global network of the WCRC to inform regional and global campaigns by providing a unique evidence base. Reciprocally, they receive support from regional and global actors. In this way, local actors are enabled to engage with global players on eye level.

In 2024, In both countries, National GRAPE Platforms were launched and started their work, marking a significant milestone in expanding the programme to nationally effective advocacy campaigns. Under the GRAPE project, the WCRC,

with the support of the member churches, establishes a GRAPE National Platform in each participating country. The GRAPE National Platform is a collective or coalition of signatory WCRC member churches, ecumenical churches, faith-based organizations, civil society and individuals (activists, church parishioners, GRAPE team alumni, citizens) committed to publicly advocate for a common specified goal in a faith-based, non-violent manner. Alongside the WCRC, many actors play a crucial role in the establishment and functioning of GRAPE National Platforms.

The successful launching of the national GRAPE platforms after only 1.5 years since the start of the programme marked an important and crucial milestone for GRAPE, bringing the churches together to rally behind one advocacy goal for the country. It consolidated the work of GRAPE within the churches and their structures, putting the fight for social and economic justice on their agenda. In both countries the collaboration between churches and civil society organisation is encouraging. Both acknowledge the complementary benefit of the collaboration by providing different perspectives to the campaign and mutual reinforce the work.

Besides the WCRC member churches this also included Archbishop Thabo Makgoba (Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa and the President of the South African Council of Churches (SACC)), Father Michael Lapsley (Founder of the Institute for Healing of Memories) and Prof Reggie Nel (Dean of Theology - Stellenbosch University). Archbishop Makgoba said about the Grape campaign: “A Universal Basic Income is the yardstick of the new government to achieve tangible results and to improve the lives of many millions of South Africans. A Universal Basic Income is the starting line a prerequisite which provides a platform to kickstart equitable and sustainable development for all South Africans.”

Theology of Advocacy

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) understands advocacy as a core expression of faith. Advocacy in the WCRC responds to the call “to stand where God stands”. This fundamental commitment shapes the understanding of its advocacy work. While the legal definition defines advocacy as the act of speaking on behalf of someone in support of something, the WCRC emphasizes the agency of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused. Advocacy work in the WCRC seeks to amplify the voices of local people in the struggles in which they engage.

Several member churches have a long tradition of social involvement. Churches, especially in the Global South, are often an integral part of the struggle for political freedom and became people's platforms, where human rights and social issues are taken up directly. In situations where actors were silenced, churches provide a space where people could speak out.

Advocacy in the WCRC is a fundamental way of "standing where God stands" with the wronged. In order to understand the kind of advocacy that is needed in our days and times, the newly created Mission and Advocacy desk, have organzied a Theology of Advocacy consultation that took place in Hannover, Germany from November 28th-December 2nd, 2024. The consultation brought together leaders, theologians and activists who have been in the advocacy field and wrestled with what advocacy means on the ground, participants from WCRC regional bodies, and partners from Palestine, South Africa, Philippines, along with representatives of our member churches from Europe, USA and Canada.

The reality of today's speaks to the need for advocacy to be defined and rethought as the world still suffers from contexts of oppression, genocide, war, and violence that abounds in our present context and make up for an unequal and unjust conditions of living. Furthermore, the reality today has shown that well recognized international institutes that has historically been recognized to hold power, has its own limitations that is indicated by the Western powers.

The West has domesticated the way we do advocacy to fit into that western perspective and definition of advocacy that does not jeopardize and challenge the system of power and challenges the inequality of systems of power. As such, the way theology was built to support that claim to power has furthermore enclosed advocacy to keep it confined within the parameters of what the empire agrees it extent. Therefore, it is crucial to think of theology through an advocacy lens, and how can theology go hand in hand as an advocacy tool. Many member churches have a longstanding tradition of social engagement.

This consultation aligns with our objective as part of the WCRC Strategic 2018-2024: "The church is called to prophetically witness for transformation. This is central to its missiological imperative. Witnessing for transformation is essential to the vision of the WCRC. The WCRC will therefore seek to increase its witness through specifically-directed advocacy work with a particular focus on the global dimensions of this work. It also specifically means working with other ecumenical bodies and associations that are involved in advocacy work."

Therefore, this consultation wrestled with how can we define advocacy nowadays and about the prophetic role of the theological understanding of advocacy.

Objectives:

- To think critically of how we define and engage in advocacy work.
- To link and root the advocacy discourse with theological foundations
- To provide direction and framework for what advocacy programmes should be shaped and addressed
- To theologically understand advocacy and its foundation in the context of our world today

Outcomes:

The consultation culminated in a formal call for a two-pronged, radical response: the decolonization of the church's theology and practice, and centered a lot around what is happening in Palestine and how it is a litmus test to our moral integrity that tests the very truth of the Christian faith and witness.

In conclusion, together these perspectives paint a picture of advocacy that is strategic, deeply theological, self-critical, and fundamentally committed to walking in solidarity with the marginalized—a true embodiment of the belief that "God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused" (Belhar Confession, Accra Confession).

Peace and Reconciliation initiatives

As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in… empire. In using the term "empire" we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.

Palestine

In 2017, the General Council of the WCRC received a call from the Palestinian Christian community urging a response to the deep injustices and suffering in their homeland. The council responded by adopting Action 55, which recognized that the integrity of Christian faith and practice is at stake in the face of the oppression experienced in Palestine. The resolution mandated the WCRC Secretariat to:

- Gather and share studies and resources addressing the Palestinian people's plight, with an emphasis on transforming the conflict into a just and peaceful society.
- Engage in theological reflection and discernment, examining how theological interpretations have been used to justify oppression, with the goal of guiding churches toward prophetic action.
- Encourage the WCRC Executive Committee to support initiatives focused on dialogue, civil peace services, mediation, conflict prevention, and conflict transformation.

In 2021, the WCRC released a comprehensive resource that lifts up Palestinian voices while placing the situation into theological, historical, and political contexts. It is the direct result of actions taken by the 2017 General Council, taken after hearing the cries of Palestinian Christians for justice and solidarity: Focus: Palestine.[10]

Focus: Palestine was developed as a freely accessible collection of studies, theological reflections, and advocacy tools. It consists of three main sections, an extensive appendix, and linked video resources, all available for download, reproduction, and distribution for non-profit use with proper attribution.

Focus: Palestine includes:

- Part 1: The historical and current context of the Palestinian struggle.
- Part 2: Theological reflections on justice, reconciliation, and solidarity.
- Part 3: Practical resources for advocacy, education, and engagement.
- Appendices: Supplementary materials and additional references.

Co-authors Katherine Cunningham and Noushin Darya Framke emphasize the importance of this work, stating: "Hear the Palestinian church's call. Listen to their stories and struggles; witness their hope and resilience. Then, 'Go and Tell'—take

[10] See: [https://wcrc.eu/mission/palestine/].

action boldly. Our prayer is that this handbook will inspire you to be a voice for justice and truth. May it be a pilgrimage of the heart and, even more, a journey into solidarity."

Focus: Palestine serves as a vital tool for churches and faith-based organizations seeking to deepen their understanding and commitment to peace and reconciliation in Palestine. The WCRC invites all member churches and ecumenical partners to utilize this resource in their efforts toward justice and peace. The handbook operates on three essential levels:

1. Deconstructing Empire's Narrative: it provides the historical and political context that counters the propaganda of empire. It equips churches to understand the situation not as a simple "conflict" but as a modern manifestation of settler colonialism and a stark example of the "system of domination" described in the Accra Confession.
2. Decolonizing Theology: it engages in the vital work of theological reflection and discernment mandated by Action 55. It directly challenges the erroneous interpretations that serve empire and offers a liberating theology rooted in justice, solidarity, and the God who "stands against injustice and with the wronged" (Belhar Confession).
3. Prophetic Action in Solidarity: it lays out the tools for advocacy and engagement. This is where "with-ness" becomes action. It moves the global communion beyond statements to tangible solidarity.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is noted for being called to communion and committed to justice. As the World Communion of Reformed Churches reflects upon and discerns its way forward in far more detriorating situation in Palestine and more life threating, we are called now more than ever to use foundational confessions in our discernment and decisions. In this context, the Accra Confession of the WCRC and its partner creedal statement from South Africa, the Belhar Confession, are the key guides, along with a careful study of the Bible which removes erroneous narratives and interpretations.

Palestine: The World Communion of Reformed Churches continued its solidarity with the people of Palestine by its support of Kairos Palestine. In 2019, a WCRC delegation made a solidarity visit to Palestine and met the relevant partners such as: Sabeel, DSPR, B'Tselem in that context. Further the WCRC Europe also made a solidarity visit to the region in 2023.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) continues to work with our brothers and sisters in Palestine through partnership with Kairos Palestine rooted in shared theological conviction and a commitment to advocacy and justice. This partnership is not merely programmatic but is a profound expression of ecumenical solidarity.

Kairos Palestine is a Christian Palestinian movement, born out of the Kairos Document, which advocates for ending the Israeli occupation and achieving a just solution to the conflict. The Kairos Document is the word of Christian Palestinians to the world about what is happening in Palestine.

In 2009, Kairos Palestine described that they have reached a dead end in the tragedy of the Palestinian people. The hearts of the faithful are filled with pain and with questioning: What is the international community doing? What are the political leaders in Palestine, in Israel and in the Arab world doing? What is the Church doing? The problem is not just a political one. It is a policy in which human beings are destroyed, and this must be of concern to the Church. In 2025, the situation is far more brutal and life threating than it ever was, and to be cantering the voices of those being deliberately and systematically silenced is as crucial and urgent as it ever was.

Ukraine Network

Just prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the WCRC, in cooperation with WCRC Europe, invited member churches in Europe and mission organizations that engage in Ukraine for a digital consultation to prepare a joint approach to the situation. After this consultation, a network was formed that has since convened weekly to coordinate the activities of the different partners to express solidarity and support the churches in Ukraine. This network is very active and serves as a platform for sharing ideas and planning coordinated activities.

The WCRC also initiated two ecumenical peace prayers on in March 2022 and March 2023, which were cosponsored by LWF, World Methodist Council, Mennonite World Conference, and the Conference of European Churches. The peace prayer in 2022 was attended by more than 3,000 viewers.

At the Executive Committee in 2022, the Collegial General Secretariat offered a reflection that outlined the position of the WCRC in the context of the invasion:

“Our Executive Committee meeting has the theme “Stand firm and let nothing move you” (1 Corinthians 15:58). In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul puts this call at the end of his reflection on the resurrection. The appeal does not conceal the

harshness of the realities of human life. One does not call upon people to stand firm when there is nothing to worry about. Paul's letters explicitly refer to experiences of persecution, violence, and death. At no moment he would downplay the suffering, the pain, or the doubts. But at the same time, he is deeply convinced that death does not have the last word. In his faith, the resurrection opens a horizon of hope that changes the perception of the present. His appeal to stand firm calls us not to allow desperation and fear to move us away from the resurrection and continue to explore the potential of hope even in the most challenging situations. [...]

In recent months, it has been particularly the Russian invasion of Ukraine that provoked this kind of self-examination of the sources of our hope and the foundations of our peace witness. As the WCRC, we have always been sceptical of the notion of peace. Our analysis of empire pointed us to engage with the underlying destructiveness of the current world order. The Russian invasion demonstrates how fragile the instruments are that have been developed after World War 2 to prevent wars. The Russian attack confirms the conviction of the Accra Confession that economic globalization is aggravating conflicts and is, therefore, an unsuitable instrument to maintain peace.

But the invasion also challenges the confidence in a global order based on international law. In the Russian example, the obligations of the international order even fuel aggression. Political and religious leaders reject the universal principles that are at the core of the international order as an onslaught on national identity, which must be rejected by all means.

In the Racism, Authoritarianism, and Nationalism (RAN) programme of the WCRC, we have detected this violent pattern in several current conflicts. The current war affirms the need to engage with this destructive dialectic of the universal order as a matter of urgency. We need to find a way to get out of the violent alternative that only gives us two options: We either accept that universal values must be enforced, or we condone that identity must be defended against this enforcement. Even if we regard the universal principles of the Enlightenment as substantial resources for peace-making, we must acknowledge that both options are inherently violent and legitimize military force.

In this situation, the theme of our Executive Committee meeting becomes very relevant. Paul's call to stand firm in the resurrection perspective is a rejection of all forces of death, however they are motivated. The appeal to not move from the hope of the resurrection with the question, "what does God require of us?" (Micah 16:8).

In a situation where old paradigms are shattered, what is our calling in receiving God's gift of peace?

In an opinion piece, Marco Hofheinz, a German Reformed theologian, in his search for an answer to this question, points to a letter that John Calvin wrote to the congregation in Aix en Provance in 1561. Facing brutal religious persecution, the congregation had written to Calvin: "What can we do in persecution? Should we defend ourselves against our enemies by force of arms? Should we give in to our enemies and let them triumph?"

In his answer, Calvin clearly distinguishes between legal rights and Christian calling. Legally, it is legitimate "to avenge ourselves on a mutinous populace, because this is not resisting the order of justice; nay, that the laws themselves arm both great and small against robbers." But while Calvin affirms the legal right to resist, he cautions the congregation that by taking up this right, we "prevent God from coming to our relief."

At first glance, this sounds very cruel. By waiving the right to resist, the only option left seems to be to give in to the oppressor. But this was not Calvin's intention at all. Indifference to the suffering of innocent victims of war for him is not an option. But instead of condoning armed resistance, Calvin called for active perseverance as a third way that should lead Christians out of the dilemma of choosing between either giving in or violating God's commandments. For Calvin, active perseverance is a blessed state that allows God, who is faithful to the promise to sustain and protect his people after their enemies shall have vented all their rage, to come to our relief.

As the World Communion of Reformed Churches, we should never condone injustice, oppression, or violence. But even if we agree that, in some situations, armed resistance is legitimate or even mandated, we are called to act within the space that God's promise opens for our witness. The Accra Confession calls such witness "covenanting for justice": By entering into God's covenant with all creation, Christians become part of God's saving work that promises to bring life in its fullness for all. If we look at the responses to the Russian invasion, we see many examples of such covenanting.

The violent division of friend and foe does not cover the whole reality. The vibrant civil society in Ukraine, which has been invigorated by the challenges of the war, is an impressive example: The firm will to not give in to the forces of destruction is not directed against anyone but wants to secure spaces in which life can flourish even in the atrocities of the war.

Churches and civil society groups in Ukraine, but also in Europe, North America, and Asia are working together to let humanity prevail in times of war. This witnessing for peace is neither naïve nor ignorant of people's suffering in war. But it opens a horizon of active engagement that is completely invisible in the binary logic of military engagement. And even if churches and civil society are not strong enough to stop the brutality, they can contribute much to fostering a spirit of defiance that will not give in to the notion of defeat.

The firm conviction that war is wrong is a vital resource for the perseverance required to sustain prolonged periods of hardship. As in many other war zones, life will remain threatened in Ukraine. This situation will be an enormous challenge to all people determined to uphold their humanity against the forces of terror and oppression. In such a situation, the belief that God blesses the peacemakers becomes a very significant political resource."

Cameroon

2019-2020

In response to the emerging situation in Cameroon and the escalating violence and the threat of civil war, the WCRC has been in regular communication with the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and the Council of Churches along with other ecumenical partners including the WCC, the AACC, the ACRC, Mission 21, the United Evangelical Mission, CEVAA and the PC(USA). Two preparatory meetings (an ecumenical ad hoc meeting, Sep 2019 in Wuppertal; a strategy meeting, Dec 2019 in Nairobi) and one solidarity visit took place (March 2020):

As a result of these efforts an Ecumenical Forum on the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon has been formed.

The aim of the Ecumenical Forum on the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon shall be

- to internationalize the search for peaceful, negotiated solutions to the crisis in the Anglophone areas in Cameroon
- through a coordinated approach to global ecumenical advocacy
- aimed at global (public) opinion, African and international institutions/ community and the world religious community.

The Ecumenical Forum held regular Zoom calls to accompany religious leaders in the anglophone provinces and held several workshops and roundtable confer-

ences. The format of these activities was ecumenical and interreligious. A unified approach to the crisis was an important objective of the project. The process united the Protestant Churches in Cameroon. We are particularly grateful about the strong participation of the Roman Catholic Church and the Muslim Community
The roundtable in 2023 in Yaoundé produced a powerful call for peace, which was signed by Protestant and Catholic church leaders and the head Imams from all provinces in the country:

CALL FOR PEACE IN CAMEROON
Issued by Inter-Religious Leaders in Cameroon, representing the Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal and Muslim Communities at an inter-religious round table conversation on the theme "Deepening Understanding for Effective Coordination and Collegial Action for Peace in Cameroon" held at the National Episcopal Centre Mvolye, Yaounde, 8 - 10 August 2023.

As Inter-Religious Leaders in Cameroon representing the Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal and Muslim Communities we solemnly declare the following:

1. That we are dedicated and committed to promoting Justice, Peace, Social Cohesion, National Integration and sustainable dialogue amongst our religious communities for a common national brotherhood in our country Cameroon.
2. We call on all Non-State Armed Groups to lay down their arms and appeal to the Armed Officers to be more responsible and progressively professional in executing their duties of protecting the citizens.
3. We strongly plead to all Cameroonians in the country and in the diaspora to engage in creating platforms of genuine inclusive dialogue for peace in our country.
4. We implore the government to add speed and scale up the implementation of the Presidential Plan for Reconstruction and Development for the Northwest and Southwest Regions and propose the intensification of the Presidential Plan to the Boko Haram afflicted areas of the Northern parts of Cameroon.

As Inter-Religious Leaders, we declare our willingness to engage in accountable partnerships for economic and social recovery, improving social services and strengthening social cohesion in our country.

1. We uncompromisingly advocate the right to life, health and education as fundamental human rights, which unfortunately continue to be disregarded while widespread atrocities persist. There can be no peace without development, no development without peace and no lasting peace or sustainable development without respect for human rights, the rule of law (Jan Eliasson, former UN Deputy Secretary-General).
2. It is a contradiction if the political ambition to preserve territorial integrity or the dream of self-determination to statehood is pursued at the expense of the life of innocent civilians. No war is just; all wars are immoral.
3. We, therefore, call for moral maturity from each of the warring parties and plead to consider laying down their weapons as a goodwill gesture for mediated dialogue.
4. We call on all religious adherents in Cameroon to remain peaceful, prayerful, tolerant, patriotic, and committed to nation-building in Cameroon.
5. We express our gratitude to our international partners that are organized in the Inter-Religious Forum for Justice and Peace in Cameroon for their support of our roundtable conference.

Today, the people of Cameroon continue to shoulder the travail of the burdens of our nation with the writhing cry of pain as of childbirth. As Inter-Religious Leaders, we will give ourselves no rest until Cameroon is delivered of war and evil.

We remind our members and all Cameroonians of our collective responsibility to make our country a haven of peace through the avoidance of hate speech. Let us align with God's plan for our common destiny as a Nation and to be aware of an eternal accountability to God Almighty in the fullness of time.

The Holy Quran and the Holy Bible remind us that "Thou shall not kill" thus, Inter-Religious Leaders call on all Cameroonians to value human life and to seek God's face through supplications and intercessions for humanity. This will be intensified through organized National Prayers by the Inter-Religious Leaders in the days ahead.

Korea

The WCRC continued its support of the Korean Peace and Reconciliation. In 2018, before the Executive Committee, a team of members from the WCRC along with the World Council of Churches visited North Korea on a solidarity visit. This was much appreciated by both the North and the South Korean churches. In the following

years the WCRC continued to support the Ecumenical Forum for Korea and the Korean peace appeal.

- Breaking the Isolation: By physically crossing the border, the ecumenical delegation broke through a wall of political and ideological isolation. This act of presence sent a powerful message to the global church and the world: that the people of North Korea are not a political abstraction but part of the human family and the body of Christ, deserving of dialogue and solidarity.
- Pastoral Ministry: The visit was much appreciated because it provided pastoral encouragement to the small, isolated Christian community in the North, assuring them they were not forgotten by their global siblings in faith.
- Building Bridges: It served as a crucial confidence-building measure, demonstrating to both Koreas that the global ecumenical community is a committed and neutral partner for peace, not an agent of any government's agenda.

The WCRC's work did not end with the visit. It shifted to long-term, strategic advocacy:

- Support for the Ecumenical Forum for Korea: This forum is a key platform that brings together churches and ecumenical partners from around the world to coordinate strategy, share information, and amplify a unified Christian voice for peace on the peninsula. The WCRC's active participation ensures a Reformed perspective—rooted in justice, reconciliation, and confessional courage—is part of this ecumenical effort.
- Endorsement of the Korean Peace Appeal: This appeal is a grassroots, global campaign calling for a formal end to the Korean War and its replacement with a permanent peace treaty. By supporting it, the WCRC aligns itself with the clear desire of the Korean people, both North and South, for an end to 70+ years of a "temporary" armistice that perpetuates a state of war and militarization

Taiwan

The WCRC continues its active support of the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum. It both serves as a co-moderator of the forum as well as seeks to support the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan in this endeavor. A full forum meeting is planned in the year of 2026.

P5: Working with All the Partners God Provides

Introduction

The Ecumenism and Interreligious Engagement Concept Note for the 27th General Council in Chiang Mai describes the context in which the WCRC attempts to build relationships with partners in the ecumenical movement and beyond, as follows:

> "'To be Reformed is to be ecumenical.' For Reformed Christians, this sentence is more than a slogan. It speaks to a critical aspect of Reformed identity, one that is demonstrated in our history. The understanding that the church was always reforming according to the Word of God opened the doors for profound ecumenical engagement. The conciliar structure allowed the integration of different voices and traditions into the discernment of the church. [...]
>
> In recent years, however, the ecumenical landscape has shifted dramatically. The centre of gravity of Christianity has moved to the Global South. New church movements and ecumenical fellowships have emerged. Today, the World Council of Churches only represents 25% of Christianity. Merely 3,5% of Christianity identifies as Reformed in the broadest sense. These changes also affect the member churches. Denominational ties have loosened. Many members relate to several affiliations and move their affiliations in the course of their lives. In many parts of the world, the structures of a well-defined Christendom are in the process of ceasing to exist. [...]
>
> The upcoming General Council in Chiang Mai is an opportunity to test the Reformed resources and develop them to meet these challenges. In the past, the Reformed tradition has proven to be very adaptable and able to demonstrate its relevance in new ways. This concept paper is optimistic that the Reformed openness for the Holy Spirit calling us for something new will be an important resource for our ecumenical and interfaith work under changed conditions."

In the years since the Leipzig General Council, it has become even clearer that cooperating with all partners God provides is not only a theological imperative but also a necessity if we want to maintain our structures that sustain our mission.

In the following, we share significant activities of relationship building from the past eight years.

Cooperation with the WCC

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) have a long history of partnership based on their shared commitment to Christian unity, justice, and witness. Their collaboration includes theological dialogue, joint advocacy, and coordinated efforts on global issues such as economic justice, climate change, and peacebuilding. A notable example of this partnership is the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative, where both organisations work with other ecumenical partners to challenge systemic economic injustices and support a more equitable global financial order. By combining the WCC's broad ecumenical influence with the WCRC's Reformed theological outlook and strong regional networks, this cooperation enhances efforts to realise God's mission of reconciliation and transformation in the world.

The WCRC attended and participated in the Karlsruhe Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held at a gathering in Seoul in spring 2022. During this time, the WCRC engaged in a process with theologians and church leaders to explore the theme of the WCC assembly. In a publication entitled, "Come Join the Circle", theologians from around the world reflected on the Karlsruhe assembly theme, "Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity". The publication was widely recognized and accepted by the ecumenical community.

Partnership with the Council for World Mission

The Council for World Mission and the World Communion of Reformed Churches have shared a long and historic partnership that goes beyond its programmatic collaboration to a shared mission and vision. One of the ways this vision has been implemented is through the support provided by the Council for World Mission for justice work. This financial support for the operational budget of the WCRC has been gratefully received and used to cover the salary of the Executive Secretary for Justice and Witness.

The CWM and the WCRC have also collaborated programmatically on several areas, including the NIFEA process, in which the CWM has provided valuable insights and support. The CWM and the WCRC have also worked closely together on issues of economic justice, particularly in areas such as money and Cryptocurrency, and debt. There have been consultations on both of these issues, as well as on the question of Gender and Militarization. The CWM and the WCRC have also worked closely on the questions of Empire and Genocide, the two organizations have held two consultations on this issue. The first being in Windhoek, Namibia and the second in Istanbul Turkey. Both consultations sought to create a platform where the voices of those communities that had suffered Genocide, Ecocide and mass-murder could be heard.

The Reformed Ecumenical Office in Rome

In recent years, the WCRC has discovered that Rome is a significant ecumenical space where several issues are discussed that are at the interest of the WCRC. Rome is obviously the location of the Vatican, but it also the centre of several groups that pursue justice agendas that follow strategic objectives similar to the WCRC. Of interest is also the presence of the ambassadors to the Holy See that pursue important peace and reconciliation agenda.

The WCRC will never abandon its priority to Geneva as the primary ecumenical space, but it seemed to be an interesting venture to establish a liaison office in Rome, if the means for such a project could be secured. Such a presence would also offer the opportunity to present pertinent issues on the Reformed agenda to a Catholic audience.

The opportunity for the establishment of a Reformed Ecumenical Office in Rome arose when the Waldensian Church, the local member of the WCRC, affirmed the idea and the Church of Scotland offered the possibility of a joint venture that would allow the appointment of a liaison officer. In this construct, the Church of Scotland would offer half a full-time position for the liaison office (in the other half the person would serve the St Andrews Church of Scotland in Rome), the Waldensian Church would offer the office space and its institutions would collaborate with the Reformed Ecumenical Office, and the WCRC would offer funds for the programmatic work.

In 2022, the three bodies signed a memorandum of understanding that defined the goals of the Reformed Ecumenical Office:

> "The World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Church of Scotland and the Tavola Valdese agree to strengthen the Reformed presence of the WCRC in Rome and plan the following:
>
> a. to strengthen the Reformed presence in Rome by creating a Reformed ecumenical office
> i. that shall present significant Reformed initiatives to the ecumenical community in Rome;
> ii. and seek ecumenical dialogue and engagement and joint action for peace and justice with ecumenical partners in Rome;
> b. the Reformed Ecumenical Office office shall be established in close cooperation with the World Methodist Council, its ecumenical office in Rome and other ecumenical partners."

Liaison with the Vatican:

During the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Grech, general secretary of the Synod, invited the Liaison Officer to attend the opening Session of the Synod where the reports of the Committees were presented; the Liaison officer was only one of a few invited to observe in-person the proceedings. Additionally, the Liaison officer was invited to join the opening and closing Mass of the Synod as well as join the procession with the Synod delegates, again as one of a few non-participants as a sign thanks and commitment by the Synod Office. The Liaison officer also attended the two public sessions.

Other participation included fringe events with fraternal delegates, theological advisors to the synod and woman leaders at the synod. Many of the conversations focused on sharing synodality, women and ordination and the leadership of lay people in reformed churches.

A good relationship is developing with Archbishop Pace, Secretary, Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (DPCU). The appointment of a staff person responsible for relationships with the reformed is awaiting the support from the American Bishops Conference.

Other dicastery are becoming aware of the presence of Reformed Churches Ecumenical Office with introductory conversations occurring.

Collaboration with Ecumenical Partners

Good relationships exist with the Anglican Centre in Rome (ACR), and the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome (MEOR) where the officers meet regularly for prayer and to share concerning current ecumenical activities.

Collaboration relating to the Synod of Bishops meeting included facilitating reflections of fraternal delegates to the synod of Bishops in conversation with leadership from the Synod Secretariat and the DPCU.

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity the Rome office collaborated with the ACR, the MEOR and the Armenian Legate to host a webinar "Experiences of the Fraternal Delegates at the Synod on Synodality" It can be viewed at https://youtu.be/GFZB51JGvQE?si=J2sG-FznXWtjdZAo

Visiting Leaders Programmes

The Rome office has supported visiting leaders by facilitating meetings and conversations in accordance with the identified priorities for their Rome program. Leaders from:

- The Presbyterian Church in Canada - General Secretary
- Presbyterian Church (USA) - Former Moderator
- The Presbyterian Church in Canada - Former Moderator
- Four Corners Festival (Ecumenical Peace building team from Belfast)
- United Reformed Church – Roman Catholic Dialogue (United Kingdom)

She concludes: The Reformed Churches Ecumenical Office Rome is developing relationships and networks raising awareness of the presence of the Reformed in Rome and ministry of the WCRC member churches.

Second Reformed Ecumenical Symposium

The Second Reformed Ecumenical Symposium was developed in collaboration with the Facoltà Valdese di Teologia. The 2024 Symposium focused on "Worldwide Christianity in an Era of Accelerated Mobility".

Geographical mobility for reasons of faith has been a characteristic of Reformed churches since its beginnings in the 16th century. This mobility made this component of occidental Christianity a global phenomenon, rooted in culturally specific and consequently diverse congregational settings, with a capacity to reshape its organization according to the different contexts.

The 2024 symposium focused on the impact of migration and geographical mobility on church reality and theology. It engaged in a theological discourse on the current realities of the mobility of people arriving in and moving through Europe and identified challenges and changes to ecumenical models of collaboration and support for people marginalised due to migration from political, oppression or economic factors.

The symposium generated good discussion and theological reflection between the practitioners and academics. Unfortunately, the target audience was only partially realised. This was in part due to other international conferences in November. The public lecture received the most support.

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)

The Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was an ecumenical highlight of the Leipzig General Council in 2017. The association was the fruit of long deliberations that helped to clarify the ecumenical self-understanding of the WCRC.

The WCRC decision to associate followed the example of the association of the Methodists in 2006, which applied the methodology of the differentiating consensus of the Joint Declaration adopted by Lutherans and Catholics in 1999 and applied it to the process on which other Christian communions could join.

The JDDJ consistently follows a three-step methodology. Each section first affirms a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification. Afterwards, both partners articulated their current teaching on the doctrine of justification in a

language that the other partner would see as different but not church-dividing. On the basis of this exploration, Lutherans and Catholics could affirm in the Common Statement that their current understandings of the doctrine of justification did not fall under the condemnations of the 16th century.

This methodology created a structural openness of the Joint Declaration, which allowed other communions to associate. The WCRC would not have been able to sign a document that it had not been involved in drafting and did not speak the language of the Reformed tradition. The Methodist process of affiliation opened the opportunity to use the statement of association to add the voice of the associate to the consensus, as expressed in the JDDJ.

The WCRC is grateful for the approval of its statement of association by the signatories of the JDDJ, which affirms that the Reformed position is not seen as church-dividing. In general, the WCRC acknowledges the method of the differentiating consensus as a way to come to terms with the diversity of theological traditions and particularly welcomes the potential to come to terms with the fragmentation created by the multitude of bilateral dialogues.

The Reformed Statement of Association

The WCRC's statement of association followed the Methodist example and added the Reformed understanding of justification to the growing consensus on the current understanding of the doctrine, in which difference can be accepted as distinct but not church-dividing. The Reformed statement implemented the method of the differentiating consensus using the following four steps:

1. *We hear the consensus and agree*: Here, the statement affirms the trinitarian and Christological affirmations of the JDDJ: "By grace alone, through faith in Christ's saving work—and not because of any merit on our part—we are accepted by God. In Christ, the Spirit renews our hearts while equipping us to do the good works that God has prepared for us to walk in (JDDJ, §15)." In view of this consensus, the statement affirmed, as did the one of the Methodists, that justification and sanctification cannot be separated because both flow from the union with Christ (§4).
2. *We particularly appreciate some of the distinctive insights in the JDDJ*: In this section, the statement points to the insight formulated in JDDJ §19-21 that "our response to God's grace is itself the effect of God's grace working in us. What Christ has accomplished by his saving obedience (extra nos) is

made known and applied in us (in nobis) by the Spirit especially through God's word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper" (§ 8).

3. *The Reformed have particular emphases and additional insights to bring*: For the Reformed understanding of justification, the concept of the 'third use of the law' is particularly significant. ""Law and gospel" are not sharply contrasted but viewed as connected by their grounding in God's grace. [...] Both law and gospel are God's good gifts to us. The law is God's gracious provision of a guide for living. [...] The renewal of life (sanctification) that accompanies justification strengthens us to live (more fully) in gratitude and joyful obedience to God. This is a gift of God's grace at work in our lives" (§ 12).
4. *We wish to underscore the integral relation between justification and justice*: This section affirms the wider framework in which Reformed Christians attempt to understand God's justification. "The doctrine of justification cannot be seen in the abstract, divorced from the reality of injustice, oppression and violence in today's world.[11] Justification is, both a 'declaring righteous' and a 'setting right'" This insight may be at the root of John Calvin's insistence that justification and sanctification are inseparable (Institutes, III.2.1); they are to be thought of as a two-fold grace (duplex gratia). We acknowledge that the declaration of justification (in JDDJ 4.2) as entailing both 'forgiveness of sins' and 'renewal of life' points in this direction. We also welcome the invitation offered in paragraph 43 to further clarification of 'the relation between justification and social ethics.' In what follows, the Reformed intend an initial offering on this relation (§16, see also §17-21)."

After the Association of the WCRC the JDDJ process, in which five communions (Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Anglicans and Reformed) are journeying together developed a considerable momentum. At a joint Conference at Notre Dame University in Indiana, US, the five communions made far-reaching commitments on what they wanted to do together:

> "Our churches face similar challenges in communicating the meaning of justification to today's society in ways in which meet the experiences and

[11] Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice: § 56 [https://wcrc.eu/resource/justification-and-sacramentality/?lang=en].

needs of the world. We are gripped with the imperative of proclaiming the good news of salvation, through compassion and working for justice.

Yet the message has not reached and engaged with all humankind. There is a challenge for us to witness to God's liberating grace in ways which provoke and convey the hope and grace of the gospel.

To proclaim God's grace in our time requires connecting the distinct horizons of justification in biblical times with contemporary perspectives. Language from our traditions about the human person before God, grace and sin, forgiveness and righteousness, must come alive for people today. This work requires careful ecumenical study at all levels, locally, regionally and globally. Such bridging work results also in fresh proclamation. The world is in need of the message of God's liberating grace. In a time of individualism and commodification, we want to stand together to offer the message that God's salvation, human beings and creation are not for sale.

We will work to strengthen our witness to the common bond of baptism we share. We propose to work on creating appropriate resources for celebrations of baptism and renewal of baptismal vows where they do not exist already. In a similar way liturgies to celebrate justification and our common baptism around 31st October, the eve of All Saints, should be offered more widely. Common themes for spiritual edification and ecumenical reflection for each year should be identified.

In all these ways we wish to make more visible our common witness, in worship and service, on our journey together towards visible unity, walking together, praying together and working together. In this new reality in our common life, we shall review the application of the Lund Principle of 1952: "that churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately" which we have all affirmed."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the envisioned process came to a standstill. It was revived in 2024, when the five communions reached the following agreement:

1. To establish a JDDJ Working Group consisting of two theologians from each communion.

2. The members will be selected by mid-January 2025. It will be important to respect gender balance.
3. The Working Group will function in the same manner as Malines Conversation Group or the Group of Farfa Sabina or the St. Irenaeus Group. It will work independently but also report to the ecumenical officers of the communions who may also be present at their meetings.
4. By October of every year, the Working Group will give a report to the JDDJ Consultation Group for their meeting in November at the CS-CWC.

Ecumenical Dialogues

The WCRC partners with several Christian World Communions. We have intensive programme partnerships with the Lutheran World Federation and the World Methodist Council.

Since the Leipzig General Council, dialogue processes with the Anglican Communion, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, and the Mennonite World Conference have been concluded.

Dialogue Policy

The WCRC takes ecumenical relation very seriously. In 2020, the Communion and Theology Reference Group adopted a concept note on ecumenical dialogues that, in the future, would serve as a policy for ecumenical dialogues.

The Goals of Ecumenical Dialogues

Ecumenical dialogues serve the churches as they together seek visible unity in faith and common witness. We hope to come together in sacramental sharing and mutual recognition of ministries as signs of our deepening communion. Toward that end, the WCRC, in close cooperation with the World Council of Churches and the Global Christian Forum, explores theological differences and similarities in dialogue with other Christian World Communions, with the hope of better understanding one another and gaining insight into the mutual sharing of the wisdom of our traditions. As an expression of the unity that we have already reached, the WCRC strives for common witness around shared commitments such as advancing peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.

Preparation of Ecumenical Dialogues

Dialogues are established by agreement between two or several Christian world communions. Themes, the composition of dialogue teams, and the methodology are chosen according to the objective of visible unity and common witness.

In the WCRC, the SPPG confirms the themes and the methodology of ecumenical dialogues and appoints the members of Reformed dialogue teams upon recommendation of the Mission and Ecumenical Engagement Reference Group, which builds on a proposal by the Executive Staff Council.

Appointment of Dialogue Commissions

Members of dialogue commissions are appointed by the Officers upon recommendation of the Mission and Ecumenical Engagement Reference Group, which builds on a proposal by the Executive Staff Council. They represent the diversity of the WCRC as a communion that consists of members who, in the majority, originate in the Global South. Members of dialogue teams are selected with particular attention to the representation of women, youth, indigenous people, and people living with disabilities.

Dialogue teams representing the WCRC are coordinated by a co-chair who the SPPG appoints on recommendation by the Executive Staff Council

The Executive Secretary of Communion and Theology serves as co-secretary. In this capacity, he/she facilitates the dialogue on behalf of the WCRC and represents the policies of the WCRC in the dialogue process.

Dialogue Reports

Dialogue groups search for new avenues towards visible unity and common witness. For this purpose, they are mandated to compile reports that establish and extend the differentiating consensus that exists between particular Christian world communions.

Dialogue reports are expressions of the consensus reached in the dialogue groups and should, therefore, be distinguished from agreements between Christian world communions and their member churches. The purpose of dialogue reports is to stimulate discussion on all levels of church life.

Publication

Dialogue reports shall be published by the WCRC after they have been finalized by the dialogue groups subject to the approval by the General Secretary who has to ensure that the report does not contradict the constitutional values of the WCRC.

Reception

On recommendation of the Mission and Ecumenical Engagement Reference Group dialogue reports are referred to the Executive Committee through the Strategic Plan Programme Group. The recommendation explores the opportunities provided by the dialogue report to strengthen the relationship to the participating Christian world communion(s) on the way visible unity and common witness and makes suggestions for the process of reception by the WCRC and its member churches.

International Reformed Anglican Dialogue

In 2021, the WCRC and the Anglican Communion held a webinar to introduce the report "*Koinonia: God's Gift and Calling*, the report of the International Reformed–Anglican Dialogue (IRAD)". At this webinar, participants at the dialogue sherd insights from their different perspectives:[12]

Howard Gregory, an Anglican Archbishop from the Caribbean and co-chair of the dialogue process, welcomed the 50+ participants from around the world with an opening prayer "for the church universal and for the two communions in dialogue, that through the report and building on previous experiences, God will heal our divisions and bring us to a greater unity."

"The final report focusing on what God makes possible through the gift of *koinonia* opens up a way to look again at our differences and disagreements and place us once more in God's hands to find a way to closer unity," said Elizabeth Welch, a minister in the United Reformed Church (UK) and co-chair of the dialogue.

"The theme of *koinonia* is hardly a new topic of discussion for ecumenists," said Jamie Hawkey, a member of the Anglican dialogue team. "But the golden nugget of this report is the insight that Christians have seriously undervalued and underestimated the primary contributions of koinonia in and between the churches. The report celebrates *koinonia* as both gift and calling. What we have here in this report is a renewed operating system for dialogue between two communions that had been out of dialogue for over 30 years."

Hanns Lessing, WCRC executive secretary for communion and theology, noted that the high expectations of that previous dialogue—seeking greater unity through ecclesial unifications—were never met. "In response to these experiences, the 2020

[12] See: [https://wcrc.eu/dialogue-report-on-koinonia-commended-for-use/].

report attempts to find a deeper understanding of communion that surpasses the church order focus that often marked the ecumenical discourses of unity," he said.

"In the diversity and the conflicts of the 21st century unity calls are often regarded with suspicion, because they are seen as power devices to stifle deviating forms of difference," said Lessing. "In contrast to such closed understanding of unity, the New Testament understanding of *koinonia* is open, processual, and dynamic and calls for the continuous reception of God's gift of communion in all areas of life."

"Lived *koinonia* thrives on hospitality," said Helene Steed, a member of the Anglican dialogue team. "Hospitality continues to be radical, especially in a COVID world. *Koinonia* by its very nature keeps doors ajar, rather than shuts them. We receive the godly-givenness of *koinonia* gratefully."

"We were not just talking about our ecumenical need for *koinonia* and reconciliation but for needs within our communions, as well," said Aimee Moiso, a member of the Reformed dialogue team. She said that report asks, "Can communion/*koinonia* contain conflict so that conflict loses its power to divide us? What would that mean to come into a dialogue believing that the relationship itself was so firm in Christ that we could talk about really hard things together, deal with difficult subjects together? Can *koinonia* contain conflict? Can it encompass the conflict?"

Peter Donald of the Church of Scotland and Royce Victor of the Church of South India (CSI) shared perspectives stemming from their own contexts.

"Local churches are terribly good at putting up walls between us," said Donald. "So, I hope the report will challenge us. I hope we can all be drawn more together with Jesus Christ uniting us because storms are going to keep coming our way."

Royce noted that the ecumenical movement in India brought about two united churches, CSI and the Church of North India, which contain not only Reformed and Anglican but other traditions as well. "Today, not only the Indian church but the whole Indian society urgently need a *koinonia* between themselves, crossing the human borders and embracing each other to create a peaceful and just society," he said.

"This is a beginning of a process that we hope will move beyond this level and to the grassroots of both our communions," concluded Gregory, in commending the report for use by all levels of both communions.

Pentecostal Reformed Dialogue

The WCRC has engaged in dialogue with Pentecostal Christians since the early 1990s. The report of the third round of dialogue with the title 'Called to God's Mission', published in 2020, was the first to be officially adopted by the Pentecostal World Fellowship.

The introduction of the report summarizes the questions that were discussed during the dialogue, and the approach in which the conversation was conducted:

> "We live in exciting times! Many are responding to the gospel and many more are engaged in God's mission (*missio Dei*) among all people. How can we engage in God's mission authentically? What constitutes mission today? How does mission engage people in our communities? How do we read the signs of our times in a way that helps us respond to God's call to mission? This document is a testimony to how Pentecostal and Reformed Christians respond together to God's mission into which we have been called. We are exploring together what we think is important for the mission of the Church today. [...]
>
> Participants have wrestled with their differences and engaged in a process of discovering commonalities regarding their participation in God's mission. As we have spent several years together on our common journey, we have been surprisingly encouraged by the realization that we have sensed the Holy Spirit moving among us. The Lord of the Church prayed that his followers should be one for the sake of the one mission. Yet very often, what the world experiences is our divisive tendencies in mission, leading to confusion and apathy. In addition, religious sentiments have often been drawn into conflicts and violence in the world today in a manner which beckons us to come to new understandings of engagement in God's mission. With so much at stake, the different Church families in the world cannot afford to engage in mission in a manner that promotes division and competition. [...]
>
> We began our work together, reading the signs of the times as we thought about the mission in which we are engaged. This led to the formulation of the following questions, which guided the discussions and appear in the four sections of this report:

- How does our understanding of the nature and scope of salvation influence the way we think about and practice mission?
- How do we view the issue of power and the role of the Holy Spirit when we speak about mission?
- In what way does the unity of the Church impact the nature and effectiveness of mission?
- How do our views of eschatology affect our practice of mission?

Since both traditions embrace a diversity of missiologies, we have tried to formulate a vision of the mission of God (missio Dei) that Pentecostal and Reformed Christians can live out together. We wish to encourage other Pentecostal and Reformed Christians to join us and engage with this vision. We need one another, and we want to encourage further dialogue and common witness as we live toward the Kingdom of God."

The report concludes with the following commitments:

"As Pentecostal and Reformed brothers and sisters, who have come to know and respect one another, together, we commit ourselves:

- To encourage and promote dialogue among Reformed and Pentecostal Christians in different contexts.
- To follow the Holy Spirit in embracing God's mission as God gives it to us, and not expect the Spirit to follow us, or our ideas.
- To learn from others regarding what the Holy Spirit is doing among them, in order to obtain a more holistic understanding of mission
- To discern the work of the Holy Spirit together, within the context of the broader Church (1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 John 4:1-6) in order to discover where God is leading us in accord with the Divine mission.
- To discern and study issues surrounding injustice and the exercise of power, in order to distinguish more clearly between the authority or power that originates with God, and the claims to power that human beings sometimes make, especially when they abuse power in the name of God.
- To be more faithful to God in our engagement in mission for transformation as both Church families agree that the way we understand

justification and justice, and holistic salvation point in the same direction.

- To participate together in a Holy Spirit related mission that relies upon:
  - Relationship building. We are only one Church if we are consciously in relationship with each other;
  - Integrity in discipleship (being one in Christ; as a spiritual practice as well as in submitting to the teachings of Christ);
  - Serving one another and others through God-given gifting, our histories (experiences), and common witness/action.
  - In 2024, the Fourth Round of Dialogue commenced, focusing on the theme of understanding the church.

Mennonite Reformed Dialogue

In May 2025, churches in the Anabaptist tradition celebrated the 500th anniversary of the first voluntary baptisms of adults in Zurich. With these baptisms, the Zurich Reformation broke in two streams, the stream of Anabaptist churches on the one hand, and the stream of reformed churches on the other. In the aftermath, Reformed churches all over Europe condemned Anabaptists and called for their persecution. Many people were killed or expelled from their homes. The split was so deep that the churches from the two traditions could not even find common ground in situations where they were both persecuted.

On the occasion of the anniversary, the World Communion of Reformed churches acknowledged the guilt of Reformed churches over the last centuries: "As Reformed Christians, we acknowledge that we have largely suppressed the memory of the persecution of the Anabaptists. We confess that this persecution was, according to our present conviction, a betrayal of the Gospel."

Today, both traditions acknowledge their common beginning. The joint statement which was adopted in 2024 has the title: "Restoring Our Family to Wholeness: Seeking a Common Witness: A Common Statement of Confession, Gratitude, and Commitment."

On the foundation of this re-membering of the common roots that shape the faith of Christians in both traditions till today, the statement expresses the following commitment:

"Together, we commit ourselves to respond

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. (1 John 5:2)

Today, as Anabaptist and Reformed members of Christ's body we affirm that our witness to the world is nourished and sustained by God's grace, which enables us to love God, each other, and all creation.

Together, we commit ourselves to the sacred mission of proclaiming the Gospel of love in all our contexts, each with their own challenges and demands. We will not let fear, mistrust, or obstacles to dialogue keep us from this calling.

We promise to journey together to heal the wounds of the past and to re-member the body of Christ. We pledge to learn from each other by sharing the richness and diversity of our traditions. We bind ourselves to purposeful cooperation that affirms God's mercy and opens doors to the justice that leads to peace.

Together, we pray

We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Rom 12:5)

Together, we pray for the body of Christ. In Christ we are members of one another, brothers and sisters of the same flesh and the same Spirit. We receive this unity as a gift. In painful awareness that our differences became a source of conflict and division, we now pray for the courage and the creativity to reshape them in ways that enrich our unity in the body of Christ. The One who is creating us anew will bring this great work of peace to completion.

Together, we embrace the gift of unity in the belief that you, O God, are restoring your family to wholeness."

The highlight of the anniversary was the worship service with the theme "The Courage to Love" at the Großmünster in Zurich (where 500 years ago, people who would later identify as Anabaptists or Reformed were studying Scripture together).

In this worship, Anabaptists and their former adversaries (Reformed, Lutheran, and Catholic) performed symbolic actions of reconciliation. At the end of this ceremony, WCRC General Secretary Setri Nyomi and WMC General Secretary César Garcia performed a ritual where they washed each other's feet while the co-secretaries of the dialogue read passages from the joint statement. This process of reconciliation shall be continued during the WCRC's General Council in Chiang Mai.

World Communion
of Reformed Churches